

THE HOUSEHOLD OF GOD

C. C. MARTINDALE

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MARIE THÉRÈSE COUDERC

THE HOUSEHOLD OF GOD

By FR. C. C. MARTINDALE, S.J.

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Marie Thérèse Couderc

Foundress of the Congregation of
OUR LADY OF THE CENACLE

BY

C. C. MARTINDALE, S.J.

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DEDICATION

DEAR MRS. DALTON,—

To offer this book to you and your sister is an act of gratitude, due, now, for many years. And when I think of you and of her, I can't but remember, need I say, one whom we all love and without whom I shouldn't have met you. And with all of you, I think too of Australia; it was one of the happy paradoxes of those sad years of war, that a new Continent has come to mean so much to me, and that I can widen my affection so honestly and so far. I like to think of the days when you made your rooms at Oxford into a home for so many Australian cadets, who met on our side of the globe not always what we'd have wished for them, nor what they'd hoped for; but they found, with you, how much that was happy and healthful, and that reminded them, and that encouraged them! Better still, perhaps, were your visits to the wards of so many hospitals—the Base, Cowley, Headington, and the rest. I know what it meant to those men, and not least to the black sheep—who were not so very black, were they, after all, not to mention the one who turned out so white a lamb! I think they all of them have got home to the wide spaces and the

sun and the golden wattle—all save one. No one out there will ever know, perhaps, how you brought his home to his else so lonely deathbed; you *were* his home to him; he saw it all in you during his last days. You won't forget how his eyes lit up, and how his voice, for a space, grew stronger. You brought him more than that: he was not a Catholic, but you brought Our Lord beside him; and when Christ comes, He doesn't desert.

Now there are no more hospitals—at least not the same ones. But your name has grown loved in Whitechapel and Fulham; and I can think of many whose lives would be emptier without you; and of one in particular to whom you went so often, and over whose horrible pain the Faith dawned in peace.

Very well, remember that, and trust the future, and God, and His Holy Mother's prayers; and continue yours for me.

Yours very sincerely,

C. C. MARTINDALE.

BRUSSELS, LONDON, OXFORD.

INTRODUCTION

As long ago, I think, as 1903, I opened the book of Fr. Longhaye upon the Cenacle, of which I then knew nothing. Immediately and vehemently struck by the portrait of Mère Marie Thérèse, I took it to Fr. Garrold, who was no less profoundly impressed. "It is the face," he cried, "of a soul in Purgatory." Ever since then, and more than ever during the last five years or so, I have prayed to be allowed to write something which should make her history more accessible to English readers. This desire, which sprang first, as I said, from the impression produced by her personality, was reinforced by my ever-increasing conviction of the enormous need of Retreats for all classes of the community to-day. It seemed, therefore, a direct answer of Providence when a most gracious request reached me from the Mother-House of the Cenacle, now at Brussels, that I should write the life of Mère Marie Thérèse for a French no less than for an English-speaking public. I was promised many documents inaccessible to Fr. Longhaye, and it was felt that the book would be no mere adaptation

of his admirable work. However, the near approach of the introduction of her Cause precluded me from quoting such material as should actually constitute the depositions of the various witnesses, although I was able to see a good many original documents and to collect, as it were, some first-hand history, and above all was privileged to meet some of the Mothers of the Cenacle congregation who had actually known their foundress, including the venerable Mother-General who for five years was the Superior of Mère Marie Thérèse.

I was able, therefore, at many points to check, correct, and enrich my personal impressions; and although the perspective of this short study is slightly modified, yet with the blessing of God it may not fail altogether of its original purpose; and while it cannot claim to be an exhaustive and official history of the co-foundress of the Cenacle or of the Cenacle itself, yet it may serve to make her, and her work, better known amongst us, and to add momentum to the great enterprise of giving of Retreats.

It may elicit, too, from the faithful, those prayers which shall best advance her Cause at Rome. Needless to say, by no premature ascription of heroic sanctity or of miracles to Mère Marie Thérèse do I wish to anticipate the decisions of authority.

I may add that though, so far, the volumes of the "Household of God" series have con-

tained accounts of canonised persons only, I hope to include in one of its volumes this sketch, too, of Mère Marie Thérèse, who was surely "of the Household," and whose work on behalf of the uniquely important "retreat movement" was so invaluable.

CONVENT OF OUR LADY OF THE CENACLE,
BRUSSELS,
December, 1920.



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- I would add a mysterious little MS. *cahier* of which no one knows the origin.

Marie Thérèse Couderc

(*FEBRUARY 1, 1805—SEPTEMBER 29, 1885*)

CHAPTER I

WE have grown accustomed to look to Middle France for powerful personalities. Auvergne itself is in some sense the Yorkshire of France. There are differences, no doubt; I have always felt that the flaming skies of Provence send their reflections, as it were, across the mountain-ridges, and that something of the scent of thyme and rosemary and lavender mingles in the air that is fragrant with the turf and harsh grasses and the heather of those austere uplands. Something of the flash of the South comes and goes already in the grave eyes of those mountain farmers, and is not to be seen, perhaps, in Yorkshire! And assuredly the landscape is, again and again, more dramatic, more tragic even, more fanatic. Yet there are likenesses, most certainly, between these two lands of rolling moors and lonely farms, of old stone walls, whitewashed or gold with lichen over their else naked grey. And it is the sturdy race of Yorkshire of which the Languedoc uplanders, too, remind one. A peasant girl, drawn from her unknown home to nothing more, it would have

seemed, than to teach mountain children their minimum of letters, or to keep a discreet hostelry for timid strangers; and after her brief appearance in the publicity of this tiny stage, plunged back deliberately into complete obscurity and insignificance; reappearing for some short years, an old woman, deaf, crippled, suffering, still half misunderstood—not *she* seems likely to have been a power in any sphere of life.

Yet God, in the management of His Church, has appeared positively to delight in causing power to spring from the most secret sources; and we are sure that this life of all but utter silence is destined to extend its power without any limit—precisely, perhaps, because its influence is deep rather than visibly expansive. The *profundity* of the gaze of Mère Marie Thérèse Couderc is what those who best remember her spontaneously, yet unanimously, recall; it is so visible in her picture, that they must most certainly be speaking truth. Her eyes look at you as though from enormous distances, as though they could see you only across whole worlds of spiritual reality; a frightful suffering has impressed itself all round them, and has scarred and drawn that face; yet you need not look at the sensitive—almost (you would dare to say) *too* sensitive—and flexible lips to be sure that no slightest shadow of bitterness, resentment, harshness, spoiledness has been cast by all that pain. Purgatorial indeed has been her experience before she could look like that; but the fires of Purgatory are fires of love, and with love comes

all gentleness and tenderness and sweetness; and all human insight too, for it is the utterly purified, the pure in heart, who "see God," and, by seeing Him, know best what is "in man."

(i)

Le Plagnal is a tiny village in the diocese of Viviers, on the confines of Ardèche and the Lozère; it cannot be much altered to-day—a huddled little group of houses of grey-brown stone with tiled roofs bleached by the suns of summer, and strong to uphold the load of winter snow. The tiny church seems to shrug its shoulders up towards its squat little belfry to keep off the cold, yet its lines of austere local Gothic have much dignity, and are of a simplicity not easy to imitate.

Here, on December 25, 1791, was born in a farm-labourer's cottage a child, baptised next day Jean-Pierre-Etienne, surnamed Terme. Here you meet with a first *personality*. In the full storm of the Revolution, this child, with no resources—needed, in fact, at home to help out the poverty of his parents—resolves on the priesthood. He serves the Mass of M. Barrial, the curé, and borrows books. He carries them off to read while shepherding. He breaks off his games with the other boys, reflects for a moment, climbs a stone and informs them he is going to preach. He does so; they do not resent it; he imposes himself. He attends, when ten years old, a mission at

Lespéron, returns, and re-enacts it all by heart. His parents, desperate rather than obstinate merely in their opposition, insist that there is no money for an education; he *cannot* be a priest. Very well, he will beg. Idle dream! At fourteen he thinks he will make more, and quicker, in service. He enters service, but seeks from his masters not only wages, but instruction. Then he gets leave to take Latin lessons from the curé. Yes, says the priest, if he will learn singing too. He submits. History says no word of his success. . . .

At last he leaves the presbytery for a lay school at Langogne: its morals appal him and rout even his zeal for instruction. For a few months he teaches village children at Le Plagnal. At last, life falls into shape, he goes to the ecclesiastical college of Thueyts, and thence to the Grand Séminaire of Viviers. At twenty-three he was a priest, and though during the Hundred Days we are told he had to hide, that cannot have been due to any general measure such as nearly cut short the career of the Curé d'Ars. Le Plagnal, curé at its head, invites him to begin his priestly work by preaching them a "retreat," a mission. He did so; his perfect sincerity and enormous force of conviction stood him instead of experience, and he won all hearts.

Not far from Viviers had stood an old Roman town, Alba Augusta, its stately name shrunk, by now, to Aps. However, its castle-keep and its really fine bridge lent importance to the place,

and it was large enough to have won notoriety for the collapse of its Christian life, if for nothing else. It must be remembered that the Church in France was still but gaspingly drawing her new breath after the wounds dealt by the Revolution. Of this town M. Terme was forthwith made curé (May 11, 1815), and continued to be so till June 10, 1824, except between May 14, 1819, and August 24, 1820, when he was vicaire and then curé at Mercuer. But I cannot find records of that interspace. He was alarmed at first, not by the ridicule and even threats which his determination to reform the place is said to have evoked, but by what, for a lonely priest of twenty-four, quite inexperienced, was a gigantic task. Yet tenacity never failed him, and the records emphasise, together, his endless kindness and the patent sincerity of conviction which inspired him. He could always see two things simultaneously: the greatness of God, and His Fatherhood. He used to shake all over when he opened the Tabernacle. Yet, "Why all these anxieties?" he wrote on his return in 1821. "*Let us do great things*, relying wholly on the succours of the Lord."

He resolved at least to educate. But he had neither money nor school-teachers. He applies to the friendly curé of La Chapelle, in the canton of Villeneuve-de-Béry. The curé tells him what he knows already: that the idea is excellent; but that is all. Terme visits him again: conscience has worked; the curé offers him Sister Claire, an

ex-religious of the Presentation of Bourg-St-Andéol. "I could never understand," said the curé, "why she left her convent. Now I see." Her reasons had been family reasons; but her parents were now dead; she was free. But this woman of thirty-five felt herself needed and established at La Chapelle, and refused point-blank to leave. In her, too, conscience works; she yields to Terme's tenacity, and migrates to Aps with two companions, one of whom brings enough money to make a start. The Bishop not only blesses the school, but allows the three women to live as a community, under a rule, and with a costume approximating to those of the Presentation. Children pour in, and also postulants. And at once a difficulty appears which was destined to haunt this priest, and which he solved always in the same way. The problem of finance became pressing. At least thirty children were unable to pay anything at all for their schooling. "Be glad of it, Sister," he answered an anxious question: "it is God who shall pay for those thirty!" And when money could come from persons who seemed likely to interfere with the religious spirit of his groups, he resolutely rejected it. A well-to-do widow, bringing a little girl, offered herself as postulant, and was so satisfactory that she was made mistress of novices. At first, all went well. She was "full of ways and means"—*remplie de moyens*. But gradually she became "important": she domineered: Sister Claire was obliterated. Terme sent

the widow away; and the community taxed itself to the extent of 100 écus to compensate her. She was not too proud to take the coins.

The work increases, both in itself (it extends its instructions now to older girls and mothers) and in its sweep. Colonies go to Le Plagnal, Valvignères, Lespéron. Simultaneously, Terme's personal vision widens: he asks, like St. Francis Regis long ago, for the foreign missions. Regis was refused, but was given the evangelisation of that very diocese. Terme similarly is called by the Bishop to form one of a band of missionary priests, who, with La Louvesc, where Regis was buried, for headquarters, should spend the summers preaching amid the mountains. The Sisters are in despair. The priest, so relentless in his formation of their souls—he had twice refused Sunday communion, in public, to a Sister who was too pleased with her success in catechising—was none the less their only support and stay. He does not *dry up* their regrets; only, he refuses to allow them to “degenerate into anxiety or discouragement.” In 1824 he departs for La Louvesc.

(ii)

A superficial glance at M. Terme's life might suggest that he was continually starting new enterprises and losing interest in the old. Start new ones he assuredly did; but the tenacity which he displayed in conquering the initial difficulties, he maintained in the shape of intimate fidelity

even when absent. In the very first summer of his missionary life, he was preaching at Sablières, and there met Marie Victoire Couderc. Le Mas was a hamlet of the Sablières district, and the Coudercs had possessed for many generations its "big house" and an estate. The place was wild and lost in the uplands, and the family had none but a purely local importance. These enviable folks were, after all, but peasants, and worked extremely hard on their own land, being part and parcel of a vast patriarchal and Catholic tradition. On that tradition the Revolution had beaten violently and had not injured it. Masses had been said in the garrets of Le Mas, priests had been hidden there, or, when four walls were still too dangerous, in the crags and caverns not far off where it was still more dangerous for the priest-hunters to pursue them. Claude Couderc, born in 1780, married Anne Méry in 1801, and of their twelve children Marie-Victoire was born on February 1, 1885, and baptised next day. You will look in vain in the characters of this honourable, sensible, and courageous family for anything, so to say, twisted or distorted. Without the least trace of fanaticism, the girl grew up, not only innocent, but putting into immediate effect what seemed to her the perfectly natural applications of her principles. Not but what grace was so visible in her that the Abbé Delenne, her curé, admitted her to her First Communion when she was ten, an early age for days when that ceremony was not hastened.

From that time on, Communion became, quite simply, the centre of gravity of her life. She obtained leave to make it once during the week as well as Sundays. Sablières was an hour and a half's walk from Le Mas. Winters, now as then, and as in the days of Regis, are appalling in that district. Starting at 4, she would battle through the snow to the early Mass, make her Communion, do her marketing, return home often as late as 3, usually still fasting. Meanwhile she shared the household work with her mother. She received her schooling from one of those isolated Sisters, whose sheer personal resolution stood then in lieu of vows, till at seventeen she was sent to the Sisters of St. Joseph at Vans. Their Superior, Mère Castanier, had been twice imprisoned as an Ursuline, and all but guillotined. The amnesty had not weakened her perseverance; she had begun once more to teach, founding a little group or congregation. From this school her father came himself to fetch Marie-Victoire, to attend a mission beginning on Easter Day, 1825, at Sablières, not knowing to what destiny he was leading her.

M. Terme, who preached it, met her, and was quick to guess her extraordinary strength of character, not disguised by a certain delicacy of frame and refinement of feature. Already the quickness of repartee, the distinct sharpness of her wit, which never deserted her to the very end, were noticeable. Aps needed her; he asked for her. Hesitations: M. Couderc had not foreseen

this—his wife was ill—no dowry would be possible. For a brief interspace, Terme makes her president of a girls' association which he founds at Sablières. But in January, 1826, she goes to Aps; at Easter, Bishop Bonnet of Viviers gives her the veil, and the name Thérèse.

CHAPTER II

(i)

MEANWHILE, at La Louvesc, M. Terme was copying its apostle.* The work of reconstruction was going forward. Five priests there formed a group: M. Blachette was curé, though M. Bonnaure was Superior; M. Haon (who seems always to be affectionately designated as *le bon* M. Haon); M. Savin, who became a Jesuit in 1830; and M. Terme. The summer they spent in La Louvesc, where pilgrims flowed anew to the relics of St. Francis Regis, restored from hiding in 1802; the winters, when the roads were locked to pilgrims, but not to missionary zeal, they radiated over the country side and evangelised the mountains. Little traits of character emerge, contradictory at first sight, save in their impulsiveness. Terme founds, or fosters, a sodality of the Immaculate Conception for young girls. Its régime is austere: certain girls resist it. Terme mounts the pulpit, and publicly explains his ideal for the sodality, and why he means to adhere to it. The curé proceeds to Benediction, and has the monstrance actually in his hands. "Stop, stop, minister of Jesus Christ," Terme calls, still in the pulpit:

* On La Louvesc and St. John Francis Regis, see *Captains of Christ*, pp. 95-146.

“What are you doing? You are about to give the blessing to an undeserving flock!” Tears, sobs; the recalcitrant maidens yield. No wonder! But to compensate, a missionary preaches a sermon on “the small number of the saved.” Terme waits an hour or two, mounts the same pulpit, preaches another sermon on the small number of the lost. . . . “The harvester leaves little behind him, compared to what he takes; but few clusters remain upon the vine, in comparison to the vintage.” At Valvignères, he preaches a mission. The attendance is poor. Indignant rather than disheartened, he resolves to break the mission off. “The devil,” he is reminded, “would laugh were you to leave.” “True, I will stay; though I seem to be doing nothing, I shall be only too happy if I prevent one venial sin.” He exorcises, driving the devil out by prayers and fastings of which the Bishop has to check the violence; no work will he refuse; for self, he has no care. When he tears his hand on a rusty nail, and there is talk of amputation, his only cry will be, “I shall not be able to say Mass!” Novenas cure him; his work is safe.

However unpractical, in seeming, his methods, his objects were always practical in the extreme. He was perturbed to see that at La Louvesc the very pilgrimages gave rise to trouble. Innkeepers had no fit accommodation. Men and women were lodged pell-mell in the same rooms. A hostel for women must be started. Not only he has no money, but the school at Aps is not yet paid

off. He goes to the Bishop, who approves in theory but consults his chapter. The chapter was divided. Terme, satisfied with his Bishop, disregards the chapter and starts to look for funds. A M. and Mme. Valleton, a well-to-do, childless, and elderly couple, but "in love with their money" and able to pretext nephew and niece legatees who had a right to look forward to inheriting, to everyone's surprise offer Terme the reversion of 5,000 francs. For all but this sum, Terme buys a terrain between the church and St. Regis's spring, with an old house upon it, which, tradition said, the Jesuits of Regis's day, and Regis himself, had used for *pied-à-terre* during their missions. The room Regis was supposed to have had was carefully preserved, and a stone with the Jesuit badge on it was afterwards embedded above the door. A master-mason, Matout, is summoned from Grand-Lieu. Plans were decided on, but seemingly not proportions. It was perceived, too late, that the buildings were arising on a scale unexpectedly large, "une disposition de la Providence bien singulière," say the Annales with simplicity. M. Haon was no less simple. "It is easier," said he serenely, "to start a thing large than to enlarge it later on." But these good priests were, too, in a hurry. They impressed a score of workmen, very poor men, with families dependent on regular weekly wages. But the 5,000 francs had gone in purchase money. How pay them? Terme was sure, always, that something would turn up. Something always did,

since Providence was less shocked than we at this economic heresy.

For the unbuilt house, a staff was sought. Marguerite Barrial, niece of the curé of Le Plagnal, had just left the Presentation of Bourg-St-Andéol. She was called Sœur Agnès, was a woman of between thirty-five and forty, and a formed and excellent religious, gifted with much managing ability. She comes to La Louvesc with Marie-Thérèse and Sister Regis, and finds two postulants, Françoise Blache, a native of that town, who did ironing, and Nanette Buisson from St-Pierre-des-Macchabées, who had been a servant.* They become Sisters Marie and Stanislas. Hitherto their work for the future community had been rough; they had carried the stones, had mixed the mortar. Françoise, by her ironing, had earned their food and the hire of the tiny house, for which their poor savings, 200 francs, given gladly to M. Terme, would not suffice. Now, in the new house, in 1828, conditions were scarcely softer. True, community life is established, with Mère Agnès for Superior, and Marie-Thérèse for Mistress of Novices; and Bishop Bonnet modifies the Presentation habit, hitherto worn by some at

* She had been refused, on that score, as a novice in a religious house. Here is her humble and dignified retort. "Je ne croyais pas que ce fût une raison pour n'être pas admise dans votre maison. Notre Seigneur n'est pas venu pour être servi mais pour servir." She curtsied and withdrew. Into this perfection of *civilisation*, as well as of spirituality, can issue the breeding given by immemorial Catholicism to peasants.

any rate of the group, and introduces a black veil and violet wimple. The community is called the Filles de St. Régis, and by the end of October has received eleven novices ! True, but three or four will persevere; but a momentum is established. Many of the novices come from St-Pal, Ste-Sigolaine, and other villages, “*et toutes ne savaient faire que des rubans.*” This is regarded as an indication. A ribbon industry shall be set going, and the “indolence and destitution of the neighbourhood be coped with.” A community of St. Joseph already exists for this at St-Pal, and the curé asks that its members be allowed to join up, to share noviciate, retreats, and so on, with the Filles de St. Régis. Terme foresees all manner of developments, and is optimistic. Other developments than the expected occur; and, as usual, the moment a business looks remunerative, it becomes a nuisance—work had to be fetched, to be carried back, to be done by fixed hours; regular life went to rack and ruin. Terme sacrifices the whole enterprise just when the builder’s bills are at their worst. At this crisis, too, the Curé of Aps, to whom, owing everything, Terme could refuse nothing, asked for Sister Agnes back. She went. Who could replace her ? Sister Claire alone, but that meant the end of Aps. Sœur Thérèse, then; and at twenty-three she becomes a Superior, in whom, said he, he perceived “a sound head, a sound judgment, and a power of spiritual discrimination rarely found in a woman.”

Aps had already schooled the Sisters to rigorous experiences. Thus, at Le Plagnal, the two Sisters who formed that colony had to live in a ruined country house, held their classes in a cellar, and would wake up to find "a third covering of snow" upon their beds.* The training had been needed. For M. Savin, now at St. Agrève, asks to be made curé of St-Romain-le-Désert, a desolate village, much Protestantised, two or three hours off. It had a church, but no priest. He obtains two Sisters from La Louvesc, installs, and leaves them. They lodge in the ruined presbytery, but have to tramp to St. Agrève for Mass. Starting at daybreak, they arrive scarcely in time for High Mass, at which they communicate; soaked or frozen, they start back as quickly as may be after some coffee with which a lady near by supplies them. At home, they found great Catechism classes awaiting them; the presbytery grew too small; they held them in the church; Protestants thronged the doors. "Oh ! que ces sœurs sont instruites !" they cried.

* I suppose we may deduce, then, that even in winter they had to be content with two coverings—sheet and blanket, or two blankets, or even blanket and habit—over them. These Sisters had the charming habit of keeping up "family" life by going, probably on Thursdays, half the way to Lespéron, whence the Sisters of that colony came, with their children, to meet them. They had a picnic, and made one another little presents. On the last Thursday of each month, as far as possible, all the Sisters came back to Aps for a day's "recollection."

“Elles ont fait toutes leurs classes !” The winter became appalling. The Blessed Sacrament was now reserved in the church; but the Sisters had to tunnel under the snow and let a boy crawl through from the presbytery to see that the lamp still burned. They *borrow* bread for food; and for drink, melt the snow. This utter self-sacrifice and the Sisters’ gentle loveliness win the day. When Fr. Terme arrives at Easter, the First Communion rails are thronged, many, of either sex, having reached their twentieth year or more without the Sacraments. Alas, his zeal overshot his tact. He started controversial lectures in the church: Protestant ministers attended them; tempers suffered; there was a riot. He had to consume the Sacred Species; a little later, the Sisters left. Sisters at La Louvesc, hearing of that heroism, had implored leave to imitate it. “Hélas !” had answered Fr. Terme, “il n’y aura plus désormais de St-Romain-le-Désert.”

It is now that the destiny of the Sisters begins to show itself—under pressure, as it were. Pilgrims visit the house in such quantities that religious life becomes impossible. There was but one large ground-floor room; you reached the three or four rooms above by a ladder. “Mais dans ma famille je menais une vie plus retirée !” sighed a Sister. “My child,” announced the Founder, “in eight years this garden will be a house for religious who keep enclosure, and here shall be a church adjoining the building, and the public will enter it on the other side.” Meanwhile he gives spiritual

lectures to the guests on the End of Man, on the Mass, the *Credo*, the Duties of Mothers of Families and of Children to their Parents; he rules that those only who come to La Louvesc for nine days, or three at least, shall be received.

During 1829 he had gone to the Jesuit house at Vals near Le Puy, and had there for the first time made a retreat according to the Exercises of St. Ignatius. On his return he abruptly entered the refectory, where the Sisters were just beginning supper, and cried out: "I have a piece of news for you; but as it might rather upset some of you, I shall put it off till after supper. Go on eating as usual." The *Annales* confess that perhaps a Sister, here or there, swallowed her supper rather hastily—especially as Fr. Terme remained pacing up and down the refectory. At the end, the Community were told that four of their number were at once to go into Retreat. "Make no comment: utter no word on the subject, neither for nor against. Anyone who permits herself a single word will be answerable to me!" ("Qu'aucune réflexion ne se passe: qu'aucune parole ne soit prononcée à ce sujet, ni pour ni contre. C'est à moi que l'on en repondra si l'on se permet un seul mot!")

Plunged thus into retreat, the four Sisters received from him the book of the Exercises, and some loose sheets containing "points" of meditation. "Now," said he in conclusion, "you must give the Exercises yourselves!"

Before I explain how the rather panic-stricken

Sisters started to obey, I will finish the account of the training to which Fr. Terme still subjected them. In the summer they rose at 4.30, in winter at 5. Prayer and meditation filled half an hour; Mass followed, and then breakfast and work till 10, when they met for spiritual reading. Examen of conscience preceded dinner, and at 1 they paid a daily visit to the relics of St. Regis. At 2 they read again, and towards sunset came rosary and a visit to the Blessed Sacrament. Bed was at 9 after examen and prayers. At 3 p.m. Fr. Terme usually gave them a conference or an explanation of the catechism, during which they asked questions. Every first Friday of the month they made a day's retreat; every Thursday he examined the novices' progress in the morning, and the formed Sisters' after dinner. As usual their discipline was rigorous, almost harsh. Not only their poverty was such that they could not afford to buy their wood ready chopped but went to the forests and cut, cleaned, and bound it there themselves, but even in the garden they did half their work, manuring included, with their hands, having no tools. Even so, they kept silence, and when they went to the woods, took their meal with them—they never ate white bread nor butcher's meat—and went on working during recreation. Fr. Terme paid flying visits, gave a brief exhortation, and vanished. All his direction was forcible. "Let no one say, 'Father, I would like to improve': say, 'I *will* correct myself.' Don't fear the devil; I am your

father in Jesus Christ, and the devil shall not snatch you from my hands." He wrote a preliminary set of rules, and laid them on the Altar under the corporal. "If you knew what penances they had cost me!" And he is resolved, assuredly they shall be kept! On a Sunday, when Regis's feast is being kept, the pious Sisters leave some work unfinished and go to the High Mass and panegyric. Fr. Terme arrives and finds disorder. He forbids them to go to Vespers or the beginning of the "retreat" that followed. "If I tell the Father," said a Sister, "that I have left out part of my meditation or examen or visit, *c'est comme si on lui arrachait les ongles*—it is as bad as if I tore the nails off his fingers." One day the splendid event of troops marching through those lost mountains is announced. Sisters in the garden call to Sisters in the house . . . they fly to the door . . . they take two steps outside it . . . a scandalised Mayor perceives them, and tells Terme. He goes to the chapel, in evident anguish. Thence he escorts the community to the big room, and reproaches them for this offence. He forbids them Communion; he forbids them recreation; he departs, taking the rule-book with him. For three days Fr. Haon carries on the house and supervises the penances. Then Fr. Terme returns; and peace is restored. But he knew his own severity and defended it. The Sisters were peasants and uneducated. Only a strong hand could guide them. But he was glad, as well as loyal to authority, when it became clear

they must have an "extraordinary confessor" besides himself. Thus freedom and expansion of conscience could be assured.

It is quite certain that, with all his brusqueries, and his undoubted austerity, Fr. Terme's spirit was itself one of freedom and expansion. A tiny incident shows, even, a grain of humour. In 1832 the Jesuits were established at La Louvesc; of one of them Fr. Terme wrote: "I am travelling with Fr. X, who is a second St. Regis; and I perceive accordingly that the Saints had their faults, and God sometimes allows them to make other people pay for them. Observe, my Sister, that Lives of the Saints only mention their virtues, and keep quiet about their faults! So come, take heart! *Our* faults must be means to our own sanctification, to becoming great Saints!"

But his freedom of spirit sprang from deeper down than any mere sense of humour. "Make acts of trust," he wrote to Marie-Thérèse. "Never occupy yourself deliberately with *what is true but terrible*. Let the foolish virgins alone, and the idle servant, and the barren fig-tree; but say often, 'Lord, I want to love You, and I offer You the love that my mother Mary felt, and my patron St. Teresa, and my protector St. Regis.' Do not the Gospels contain, too, the parables of the Prodigal Son, the Lost Sheep, of Magdalen, the Samaritan Woman, and Zaccheus? And that one must forgive one's brother seventy times seven—that is, always? Could God have imposed a duty upon brothers towards brothers that

He would not Himself fulfil, as Father towards His children, or as Lover to His beloved? Fear is only the beginning of wisdom; far better is God glorified by love." He boldly appealed to that presence of Our Lord in her, which was due not alone to sanctifying grace, but definitely to the position she held as Superior. She was to reflect that she represented Christ, and was to be strong with His strength and in His Power powerful. "I need," he wrote, "hearts that love and are given over to Jesus Christ. . . . When *He* shall be your light and life, how happy you will be! . . . So have no other guide but Jesus. Let *Him* be the light of your feet, of your hands, of your very eyes, the light of your spirit and of your mind, and of your reason. Let Him be the life of your soul and of your heart. Let Him be, too, your Truth, the Truth that comes from God, which walks with simplicity according to the impulse of the Holy Ghost." Pathetically he added, "I want to tell all to love Jesus Christ *wholly*. I haven't time for it. I am too rushed. But I need only remind you that He is the Resurrection and the Life, and that even if one were dead, he should live had he but confidence in Him!"

He bade them pray always that he might do Christ's work, without specifying details; and one day he wrote to Marie-Thérèse that, when he had gone aside in order to say Mass in a chapel dedicated to Our Lady of Deliverance, he had been preparing to ask a number of favours from her, but "it came into my mind that one, and one

only, was enough, that I must only ask to do the work for which God has destined me, that I must not even seek to know what that work is, but only beg for grace to accomplish it according to the designs of God upon me. In fact, I shall henceforward limit my prayers to that. I find that enough."

None the less, he was anxious to give his Community a more definite outline and coherence.

In 1830, Fr. Deslages, S.J., preached a retreat. During it it was decided that Marie-Thérèse, the Superior, should have the title "Mother," and M. Terme that of "Father"; an additional half-hour's morning meditation was decided on; Vespers of Our Lady were to be recited aloud in the chapel, and the taking of religious vows was resolved on. Fr. Deslages announced that only the best religious should take them; each must come, and beg from him that privilege. But no one dared to consider herself "best," so no one came. Fr. Deslages was puzzled, and frankly vexed. He returned several times to ask why no one offered herself, and said that he had expected greater zeal. He even thought that the Sisters must be clinging to some possessions or other that the vow of poverty would force them to give up, and demanded to visit the house. He was so impressed, and indeed almost appalled, by its poverty, that he understood simultaneously the utter humility of these women who felt themselves unworthy of the privilege of vows. He altered his tone, encouraged them, and received

their annual vows for the first time on the closing day of the retreat.

I will indicate here the developments belonging to the brief remainder of Fr. Terme's life, for his work, now that the Congregation was established, was over.

When it became known that retreats were being given by the Filles de St. Régis, applications poured in, and with these, renewed need of money. Once, when a nine days' recitation of the " Litany of Divine Providence " had brought no succour, Fr. Terme approached the Altar, deliberately knocked at the Tabernacle door, and told Our Lord that it was for Him he was in need. Next day, the required sum came. A large gift, offered for the foundation of a boys' orphanage, was diverted, with the goodwill of its giver, to the completion of the retreat house. Foundations continue : one at Issarlès ; one at Mayres, successful from the outset ; and one at La Mastre, which never went well. Its foundation was due in part to the excessive enthusiasm of a lady in whose spiritual vicissitudes Fr. Terme could not judge how much was sheer imagination.

The journey of Sisters Joséphine, Alphonse, and St. Joseph, to Issarlès reminds one of the great pages of St. Teresa's *Foundations*. Directly they left La Louvesc it began to rain. They hesitated, but went forward, reproaching their own timidity. They travelled in an open cart, and arrived at Faye, when night fell, soaked, and to find no inn of any sort. Some good folks received them

into a barn, made a big fire, and offered them the best they could—potatoes and hot water. After this supper, the Sisters climbed to the attic and slept on hay. Next day they sent the cart home, for the road became a mere track, and the curé of Issarlès had sent two horses for them to ride on; but their guide got drunk, snow fell heavily, the path skirted great precipices, torrents had to be forded, one of the Sisters fell off her horse but fortunately was not hurt, since not a house was near where succour could be sought. Not until late next day did they reach Issarlès, still in the pouring rain, and, to the stupefaction of their hosts, absolutely none the worse for their experiences; they began without an hour's delay to organise a school! Alas! in 1832 Issarlès had to be closed.

But meanwhile, La Louvesc was acting as a magnet. M. Jaricot, brother of Mlle. Jaricot, who founded the Propagation of the Faith, was chaplain to the Hôtel Dieu at Lyons. He wished the Sisters who served it to have a more serious formation than hitherto, and started a sort of noviciate. At his death, the novices wished their training to be continued. Their elders objected, and Mlle. Jaricot, after harbouring the girls for a while in her own house, sent them to complete their formation under Mère Thérèse. This entailed an enormous added labour for Fr. Terme. Providence seemed to give him, in the person of an ex-Superior of the Sisters of St. Charles, an ideal novice-mistress. He hurried

on the taking of her vows, and named her *Sœur Ste Croix*. History at once repeated itself, and acquired, you may say, the habit. . . . For, like the indispensable widow once at Aps, this lady never could forget she too had *governed*, and rode rough-shod over *Mère Thérèse*. She had to leave.

It was after this that Fr. Terme determined to make over the house, as far as was supernaturally possible, to no earthly Superior. On the first Friday of 1832, after Mass, he unexpectedly read aloud a long and solemn yet very naïve statement to Our Lord, which, after all the Community had signed it, he put in the Tabernacle. In it he placed himself in the presence of the Most Holy Trinity and all the court of heaven, and proceeded to declare that the house does not belong to him, and that anyone who thinks it does, because he has signed the deeds relating to it, is quite wrong. "I did not have it built: it was not with moneys of mine that the workmen were paid; I do not know how it all happened. I am amazed that such large plans were followed; I did not design them. I do not understand how, without money, without resources, anyone had the audacity to buy so expensive a site, to collect materials, especially so *much* material, and to summon so large a number of workmen to the yard. And what I understand even less, is, that all these workmen should have been well paid and fully content and even have done good business. Truth exacts that I should state

that not only *I* had nothing, but that I was still heavily in debt for the house at Aps. . . .”

He then protests that the Sisters are not rich, and states accurately the sums each brought, if they brought anything. “Not even the richest gave as much as even 2,000 francs; in fact, there was only one who gave up to 1,600. . . . Yet they are all better dressed and nourished than Jesus Christ was.” The work is, manifestly, God’s. Their daily food is as much His gift as was the manna. “And though their clothes wear out, what does that matter, since You immediately give them the means of making themselves some more!”

Therefore to Mary, as Heaven’s Treasurer, he makes over the entire place, irrevocably and entirely, “reserving not so much as a needleful of cotton.” “Mother, I feel I am making you a present much soiled by my self-will; . . . I have spoilt it; . . . I deserve to be refused. And yet, I hope that you will take it. Why! Mother, how could you bring yourself to refuse a house in which your son Jesus has condescended to take a room! His presence in this house purifies it all. . . . Look how He permits these poor girls to work, how He permits them to eat, sleep, amuse themselves, laugh, in the very house He lives in Himself.” She cannot refuse them, after that. He institutes Mary as Superior-General, and enumerates the houses she must take charge of. The Superior abdicates—the Sisters are now orphans—Mary *must* accept. They all sign: “J. P. E. Terme (prêtre), Sr. Thérèse, Sr. Ste Croix, Sr. Stanislas,

Sr. Marie, Sr. Joséphine, Sr. Augustine, Sr. Régis, Sr. Marie C., Sr. Agnès, Sr. Virginie, Sr. Xavier, Marie J., Claire P., Dorothée M., Claire L.”*

About this time the Bishop gave over the shrine of St. Regis and the parish of La Louvesc to the Jesuits. An arrangement was come to by which the curé and Fr. Terme lived *en pension* with them, till some final arrangements should be arrived at. Fr. Savin had already joined the Jesuits; and Fr. Terme’s entry into the Society was decided on, but postponed only till he should have paid his debts. However, in the April of 1834 he said to the Sisters:

“This is now the tenth year of my apostolate. I shall not be a good missionary if I do not die this year. St. Regis was only ten years at his missionary work, and then he died. It is true I am not a Saint. . . .”

In the November he left to give missions at Lanarce and Le Plagnal, having first had the joy of organising, at the Jesuits’ request, the feast of the translation of Regis’s relics into a new casket and their solemn enshrining in his church.†

Before leaving, he went to say good-bye to the Sisters, and seemed unable to tear himself away from the house, starting to go and then returning. They were convinced he was leaving for the Jesuit noviciate, and the exceptional fervour and

* This document is quoted *in extenso* in the Appendix.

† The relics had been hidden during the Revolution, the silver casket being left, as Fr. Longhaye says, to the fervour of the “patriots.”

affection of his injunctions caused them all to weep. They had made him up a bundle of clean linen; he said it would be too much; he would not need it. Mère Thérèse followed him into another room and asked in anguish what would become of them if he left them. He showed her his great mission Crucifix. "Voilà, ma fille, celui que ne nous quittera pas."

At last he started on November 1, but even so sent back a message to say they were to go to Communion next day, for the Souls in Purgatory.

At Lanarce he preached thrice daily, and spent the rest of the day and most of the night in the confessional, or nursing the sick, for an epidemic was raging, apparently pneumonia, with cerebral complications. Whatever it was, he caught it, and arrived at Le Plagnal very sick. He gave one sermon and collapsed. Next day he could not say Mass, but at 10 o'clock felt better, and got up in the afternoon and tried to preach. It was useless; he went back to bed. The Sisters got into touch with one another; on all sides novenas were begun; but the doctor, quite misled about his illness, ordered him to be bled, which made him worse. The old curé, M. Barrial, believing it impossible that his little scholar should die before him, would not admit the need of the Last Sacraments. The pain in his head grew intolerable; he begged relief, like St. Aloysius on his own death-bed. Like St. Aloysius, he could not be given relief. "My God," he murmured, "if You will, You can heal me." The statue of Our Lady

consoled him; he recalled his long service of her, and her faithful Motherhood, and a little peace returned.

On the Thursday night, December 11, the Sisters, as he had taught them, were making the Holy Hour of Prayer in memory of Our Lord's Agony in the Garden. During it he lay absolutely motionless and silent. At its end it was clear that he was dying; the curé was hastily summoned; Extreme Unction and the Last Blessing were swiftly given. The messenger sent with assistance from La Louvesc returned with the news that Fr. Terme had died at 4 o'clock on the morning of December 12, 1834.

(ii)

Most of what I wish to say about the renascence of retreat-giving I will reserve for that part of this account which deals with the later development of Fr. Terme's enterprise. It remains certain that for one reason or another, or perhaps owing just to an intuition of sheer genius, or to divine inspiration, he set his Congregation definitely on the path of retreat-giving. Retreats were no new invention.* But I doubt if anyone before Fr. Terme had conceived the really audacious scheme of causing them to be given by others than priests. The rôle of his Sisters in this enterprise ought, therefore, to be explained.

At first he would not hear of the Sisters so much as mentioning the word "retreat."

* Those interested in their history will find it outlined in Fr. Plater's *Retreats for the People*.

“It would scare them. Just say that if they like, when they have satisfied their devotion at the tomb of St. Regis, and to make use of the free time left over, you will come and do some spiritual reading with them, and you will explain what you read a little, if you see they would like it. For the subjects of your reading you will take by preference the End of Man, the Importance of Salvation, the Fall of the Angels, the Fall of our First Parents, etc. You might then advise them to make one quarter or one half hour's reflection on those subjects, and without guessing it they will have made a little retreat. I am convinced that they will get practical results from it.”

The Sisters acted on this. They offered their guests books for spiritual reading and meditation, and “they accepted gratefully, and all said they would like to make use of them, adding that they did not know how to meditate. We fastened on that to explain to them that with a little goodwill it was no harder to reflect on a truth of religion than on their temporal concerns. Without mentioning the word ‘retreat,’ so frightened were *we* of that, we made them follow an order of the day, giving them three daily meditations, all taken from the Exercises of St. Ignatius. We tried to explain these meditations as well as we could to the retreatants, and we gave them a written synopsis, like the one Fr. Terme had brought us. At the same time we showed them passages suited to the subject for reading. The fervour with which they all made their retreat plunged

us into amaze. The good country-women especially were enchanted with the way in which they had done what they called their 'novena.' " And again, " when they left the house they did so most regretfully. ' Ah,' said they, ' we shall certainly come back next year ! We are *too* happy !' "

The formula has perpetuated itself; better, seemingly, than aught else it expresses the ever-recurrent impulse of spontaneous relief. From the lips, if not of country-women, at least of Canadian, South African, Australian, has it been heard, of men from the sheep-station, the distant wheat-farm, the veldt, when the calm things of eternity, the Immutable and the Infinite, have met them in and after the War that racked the world, as the Revolution once did France.

For the moment I will add little save that the work of retreat-giving by what is now the Congregation of the Cenacle has modified itself somewhat, or at least taken very definite contours. But neither at first nor later did the Sisters enter into the immediate direction of souls, still less assume the part of confessor; and then, as ever, the earnest care of their Superiors was to give them a very exact training in the knowledge of Christian doctrine. That she should very frequently teach the Catechism, with full explanation, to her daughters, was the parting injunction of Père Terme to Mère Thérèse.

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Such, then, was the life's work of this remarkable man, and he died with all of it, seemingly, unfinished.

The only fault which you can find in him is, perhaps, the impulsiveness we have mentioned, which carried him at one moment to a serene regard of liturgical minutiae, at another to certain actions which might have seemed ill-considered, like his retort courteous of a sermon on the Elect, or like his holding up a Benediction service till the recalcitrant members of the congregation should have succumbed. And again, his hopes made his judgment over-optimistic, perhaps, at times, as in his favourable verdicts on fervent but ill-balanced souls. But happy the man whose defects are such that they presuppose virtues we all must envy ! Severe he was, but first of all towards himself; and kind was he incredibly; the word *bonté* occurs at once, when any are seeking to describe him; vigorous and untutored his eloquence, as the Jesuit *Lettres Annuelles* for 1835 declare: yet even at Aps he was noted for his gravity and reserve, which are as good as the most polished manners to attract. His "profound conviction" was the source, it may be, of all the rest; his "spirit of faith," as we say, with its consequent perfect simplicity, of naïveness almost, of utter truthfulness and disregard of compromise or the falsely flexible. This at the least we can say, and we need not wish, surely, to say more: he trod faithfully in the lofty track marked by St. Francis Regis.

CHAPTER III

(i)

THE first problem the Sisters had now to confront was that of their very existence. No one knew what was to become of them. Everyone felt sure Fr. Terme had made a will, but no one could find it. His room was ransacked, a secret drawer examined . . . nothing. M. Haon and Mère Thérèse made a vow to St. Philomena, and returned to the search. There, on the top of a pile of papers on the table in Fr. Terme's room, and too obvious, I suppose, to have been noticed, lay the will. In it he constituted the last survivor from among four Sisters his sole heir, and prefixed to the will these words:

“I recommend my dear daughters of the Retreat to their glorious patron St. Regis, to His Lordship the Bishop of Viviers, and to the Jesuit Fathers.”

Mère Thérèse addressed herself accordingly to the Jesuit Provincial, Fr. Renault, who answered guardedly as for what concerned the future, but promised all help at this crisis: the Bishop was most kind, and assured her he had already appointed M. Bêchetoile of Annonay their Superior, and had made him Honorary Canon on the strength of it. The Sisters explained how

necessary they felt it to be, in view of their special vocation as religious destined to give retreats, that they should be formed and directed by someone who understood the situation from within; both the Bishop and M. Bêchetoile agreed with the greatest kindness, and remained in close touch with the Congregation thereafter. The Bishop, in fact, wrote to both Fr. Renault and Fr. Valentin, S.J., then Superior of La Louvesc, begging them to take over the care of Mère Thérèse and her communities.

Before Fr. Renault came to a definite decision, a Father X made an appearance at the Retreat-house, which was dramatic in view of its consequences. He expressed astonishment on seeing how few the Sisters were, and ended by declaring: "You are still but few: in time you shall be many. Courage and confidence! It shall happen! I know one who is far from here: but oh, if you could guess how fine a soul! She has immense wealth, but her virtues are far and away more wonderful. See, Sisters, her virtues are as far beyond her fortune as her fortune is beyond your own." He left, insisting that they would meet again.

At last, in the spring of 1835, Fr. Renault arrived. He was a man of superb type, slow to decide, but tenacious of his decisions. His judgment was so good that you yielded willingly to it even when most severe, and none could doubt the true *tenderness* latent in his inflexibilities.

He made certain points quite clear. The Society

could not possibly undertake the care, temporal no less than spiritual, of the new Congregation. Even he had been reluctant to consent to the regular spiritual direction by the Jesuit Fathers of the Sisters. However, he had seemed to hear a voice saying to him: "Take this child that lies on straw" (*Prends cet enfant qui est sur la paille*). He then declared that the Sisters should not distract their energies by teaching *and* giving retreats. Let them concentrate on the latter, even if that involved a division of forces.* As for the rules, let them wait and win experience. Rules write themselves, gradually. And let the Sisters realise that persons of wealth and position would probably not make good recruits, but that sound judgment was more likely to be found in simple and average folk. In all this, his practical wisdom was so great that his advice seems all but prophecy.

In this question of segregation of the two ideals, education and retreat-giving, his view coincided perfectly with Mère Thérèse's, and it is at least remarkable that in his will Fr. Terme definitely calls his daughters, I think for the first time, "Filles de la Retraite."†

* Fr. Renault was devoted to the Exercises, and of great assistance to Fr. Roothaan, General of the Society, who did important work on them.

† We may feel, then, that Mme. de Larochemégly is right when, in her notes, she describes the community at La Louvesc as following out the *idée mère* of Fr. Terme. It is true that his work began as an educational enterprise: but, within this, the specifying element, so to say,

In May, Fr. Sellier gave them their retreat, and about thirty-five Sisters came from the various houses. Their aptitudes, and the idea each had of her vocation, were closely examined, but without saying why. They returned home after the retreat, not realising that fifteen of their number had been considered fit for the retreat-work, and the rest, apt for education exclusively. A little later, the separation was definitely decided on. Fr. Rigaud, now Superior of La Louvesc, and the director—at first austere and irresponsible, then most zealous and affectionate—of the Sisters, submitted the plan to the Bishop, who approved. A few minor alterations were also made. The upshot was that Mère Thérèse, with five choir Sisters, three lay Sisters, and three novices, remained in possession of the house of La Louvesc, and of that only: all the other Sisters, and their houses, were formed into the Congregation of the Sœurs de St. Régis, which has done the most admirable educational work, especially in Auvergne, ever since. The separation was accomplished without any real ill-feeling, with no recrimination, no jealousy, even though it is now recognised that the “Sisters of St. Régis” felt that the decision had been taken somewhat behind their backs, and that they were being, if not sent away, at least invited to go. But though tact declared itself. This, and this only, differentiated his work from the numerous more or less contemporary creations of teaching congregations; and this precisely is what developed.

may have been lacking, neither justice nor charity was injured, and even the lack of tact was not on Mère Thérèse's side, for she, as ever, did no more than obediently accept direction. It remained that each group could claim Fr. Terme, in the full sense, for its founder; and so anxious were the teaching Sisters that no breach should be made, that they begged Mère Thérèse, such was her undisputed and enduring spiritual pre-eminence, to continue her direction of their souls. This could not be, but the two Congregations, tiny as they were, remained on terms of intimate and most edifying affection, and felt themselves, in Mère de Larochenégly's words, the two branches of Fr. Terme's great work.

Such was the second crisis which that work went through, and that it was not shipwrecked speaks volumes, as for the strength of will, so for the unselfishness, of all concerned.

Briskly it went forward and was organised. General retreats, not interfering with retreats given to individuals, were fixed down to the first and fifteenth of every month. A new house and church were forthwith necessary, and the wherewithal seemed assured. A young widow, only eighteen years old, Mme. Gallet, who entered the noviciate in 1835, was able to promise very substantial aid. The work was put in hand, and all went well. In 1837 Mère Thérèse and Sister Victorine, Mistress of Novices, pronounced their final vows; the Jesuit Fathers, especially a Fr. Augry, sent by Fr. Renault, "coached" the

Sisters with extreme accuracy in the whole theory and practice of the Exercises. As for their own rules, a provisional draft had been brought by Fr. Renault as early as May, 1836, and from that time on the Sisters began to recite a daily *Veni Creator*, a sort of instinctive response to the will of God, though hidden as yet, which ordained that the history of their houses should be linked so closely with that of the Upper Chamber which rocked to the rushing winds of Pentecost.

In June, alas ! Mme. Gallet, an exquisite and most gentle soul, died unexpectedly.* Perhaps this death helped to decide Mère Thérèse to purchase, soon after, a house at Tournon, whither some at least of the Community might fly from the appalling winters of La Louvesc.† This marked no diminution of the old hardihood, at least so far as the older Sisters were concerned ; but it was clear enough that though postulants were many, it was rare that health could with-

* Mère Thérèse, herself very ill and unable to come to her, had said lovingly to Mme. Gallet that she was to get well, and not die. . . . The poor child, who felt life ebbing, tried obediently to resist. “ No, no, Jesus ! not yet ! ” she murmured. The watching Sisters went anxiously to tell Mère Thérèse. She sent a message back, giving her leave to die. She smiled, uttered the names of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, and yielded herself to death.

† The house never prospered as a *retreat*-house. It was sold in 1860. When the Sisters arrived, its poverty was such that they had to stick their solitary candle in a potato.

stand that climate, and perseverance was correspondingly weak. It was a year of floods: the Rhône was out, there was practically no coal, the Sisters had to work like galley-slaves. They had a cart and an ancient mule to take them, or provisions, to and from La Louvesc. The mule hated the journey, but was a pious mule, and "kept on genuflecting," especially when the Sisters pushed the cart. These expeditions "avaient un grand charme," and were a cross between a picnic and a pilgrimage.

In the winter, journeys to La Louvesc were, however, far from "charming." Mère de Laro-chenégly and another Sister, having to go there in January, not only had to hold the mule up all the way, but (the road was invisible for snow) to test the depth of the drifts at each step. Arriving at 11.30, they got in by throwing stones at the windows, too cold to talk, or even to approach the stove, *which made them sick*.

Hence the promised bequest of Mme. Gallet became twice needed. Her survivors disputed it; there was a lawsuit: the Sisters lost; their debts were relatively huge. Mère Thérèse seemed revealed as a bad business woman; a kind of administrative council was formed; but she had definitely lost her financial nerve, so to say, and could not cease from self-reproach, and feared decisions. It looked as if there must be a new Superior.

Two recent arrivals at least augured well for the future. Mlle. Charlotte Contenet, an intelli-

gent and most courageous woman of forty-five, was sent to La Louvesc in August, 1838, by Fr. X for a retreat. But though her vocation seemed safe—she had, in fact, spontaneously taken a vow, at the tomb of St. Francis Regis, to enter after she should have settled family and other matters—she disappeared and remained nine months without writing. Meanwhile another lady, Mlle. M., had acquired a considerable ascendancy at La Louvesc, and I am bound to say that the admission of this moneyed, ambitious, and restless woman into the Community, at the expense of the refusal of another postulant, with whom she said she could not possibly live, seems the only incident, in all this history, which casts the shadow of a fault on Mère Thérèse's superiorship. Alas! she paid for it heavily. It was largely Mlle. M. who obtained from FF. Renault and Rigaud the creation of the administrative council of two—and of the two she saw to it that she was one—which tied the hands of the Superior. And clearly she exceeded, in that position, her powers, and engineered at least one dismissal that should not have been made. Besides, for the first time a party spirit reveals itself in the house. The *Annales* lament this state of affairs with great simplicity, but also note that when Mlle. M. took her inevitable departure, she no less frankly acknowledged that the responsibility for any spiritual deterioration was wholly hers.

However, this episode really had the character

merely of a preliminary squall. A very great lady, the Comtesse de la V., a widow, had applied for admission. She was the spiritual heroine promised, long since, by Fr. X. She was accepted, and prefaced her arrival by many costly gifts. She made her definite appearance on September 24, 1838, and after a few days of postulancy was given the habit by Fr. Renault. Fr. Rigaud, to whom she had shown the notes she had taken during a retreat under Fr. X, and who was much impressed, had decided on her suitability. A few more days passed, during which her largesses rained on the amazed Community; she went everywhere, her efficiency was universal. Mère Thérèse wrote to the Bishop and begged to be allowed to resign; Fr. Renault, with Mme. de la V., followed the letter to Viviers; on October 23, the Bishop named the postulant of not a month before, Superior.

From Paris, where the new Superior now went, bales of furniture began to arrive; and Mme. de la V. proceeded to obtain from her château all sorts of tapestries, pictures, and so forth, and unload them on La Louvesc. She altered the quality and doubled the amount of the Community's fare; the house became unrecognisable. Since she was at the same time dealing forth largess to the local curés, rebuilding churches and what not, she very soon outstripped her means and was reduced to borrowing from the least expected quarters, including the Jesuit Fathers. Probably it was due to the chaos all this induced, that

Mère Victorine Prost, a most valuable Sister, and devoted to retreat-work, yet felt her love for nursing the sick revive in her and begged to be dismissed. She went, the first of a long series of departures, which left little enough of its original material to the Community.* However, Mme. de la V. had paid a fleeting visit to La Louvesc, bringing with her a postulant, Mlle. Anais de St-P. of Orange; and shortly afterwards Mlle. Contenet returned, and took the habit on the Feast of the Sacred Heart in 1839; so did Mlle. Anais. This conjunction, again, found, later on, a significance. Meanwhile, Mme. de la V. and Mlle. Anais began to give retreats. Sister Augustine, who was extremely experienced and successful in that department, “got” (say the *Annales* with their customary simplicity) “in Mme. de la V.’s way.” So the Superior decided to send the Sister on a visit to her home, expecting her never to return. However, return she did, with three would-be exercitants, of whom one was Mlle. de Larochenégly, an experienced woman, aged thirty-five, of whom we shall hear more.†

* She entered at St. Thomas de Villeneuve, and in a year was Superior at Avignon.

† Her entry followed close upon that of Mlle. Stephanie Dambuent, which had begun by a regular escapade. At seventeen and a half years of age she cut off her hair, threw her bundle out of the window, followed it, and climbed into a tilbury which her young brother, weeping hot tears, was made to drive. They arrived at La Louvesc at 11 p.m., and everyone was in bed. This flight was not frivolous: it had its sufficient motive: Mlle. Dambuent became a solid pillar of the Cenacle.

This did not prevent the Superior's energies from displaying themselves to the extent of getting on the nerves of the retreatants. She insisted on doing everything herself, from waiting at table to getting ahead of consciences. Moreover, her expenses were such, and so well known, that the Sisters came to be reckoned millionairesses, whereas, say the same delightful Annales, "*nous étions enfoncées et enfoncées de la belle manière.*" By the time the debts had reached 128,000 francs, Fr. Renault, much too honourable a man lightly to withdraw a confidence once given, was forced to attach some weight to the rumours about the Superior, sent for Mère Thérèse from Tournon, and questioned her. Impossible to extract a word from her that should injure the woman who had ousted her. Fr. Renault, doggedly bent at last on finding out the facts, went to Tournon and examined all the Sisters in turn. The result was the instant deposition of Mme. de la V., and the nomination in her stead of Mère Contenet. Her election was unanimous, and from the last place, in the kitchen, she went straight to the first. This day of deliverance fell on the Feast of Our Lady of Ransom. Fr. Renault foresaw a number of possible allusions, and forbade any of them to be made. One Sister could not deny herself a tiny epigram. "*Il en donna facilement l'absolution.*"

Thus closed this strange year; but the shock had penetrated too deep for instant peace, even though Mme. de la V. left in January, 1840, the

year in which the Community received the title of the *Cenacle*. A number of other departures, of most excellent Sisters, hard to account for, save by the general impression of instability, occurred about the same time; and Mère Thérèse was relieved of her post of Assistant, while Mme. Anais de St. P. took her vows and was made Mistress of Novices the same day.* I will say at once that Mme. de la V. soon afterwards lost her equilibrium, started nineteen years' worth of lawsuits, threw other religious societies into confusion, wrote anonymous letters, and ended by thinking herself in personal relations with the devil.

Why do I mention this disconcerting episode? For the same three reasons as those for which I shall mention one even more disconcerting. First, because it is public property. Fr. Longhaye himself calls it "histoire ingrate, mais grandement instructive, et qu'il n'est pas loisible de

* I can say without lack of charity that I expect Mlle. Anais was in part responsible for this all but clean sweep. It is certain that Mère Contenet thoroughly believed in her; also, her humility and charity exacted that she should accept all the advice possible at the beginning of her unlooked-for superiorship, and in particular from Mlle. Anais, as a sort of compensation for the collapse of Mme. de la V., to whom Mlle. Anais owed her own vocation. It remains that these later dismissals of faultless and indeed admirable religious remain incomprehensible to the present generation of the *Cenacle*, and caused the utmost anguish to Mère Thérèse. Some were due to diocesan authority, doubtless misinformed.

supprimer.” After that, it would be an affectation to ignore it. Second, because without relating this, it would be impossible to give a true idea of the storms that the Cenacle has weathered. I consider that the full strength of its inner law of growth cannot be realised until it be known what shocks it endured from within as from without. Nor can I believe that its *divine sanction* will be fully appreciated till we realise how thoroughly good men, like Fr. X, both in this instance and afterwards, could be responsible for serious misdirection, and how motives, in great part good, could yet throw open avenues that led to ruin. A recent book, *Ex Umbris*, has boldly described the conflict which arose within the Order of Friars Preachers, owing to the difference of ideal and perhaps still more of temperament of two such extraordinarily holy religious as Père Jandel and Père Lacordaire; the Life of St. Francis Borgia, now fully written, and that of Fr. Nadal, were it written, would show how within the Society of Jesus, too, at a certain moment, there was a clash of view. Neither of these last dissensions was quite like that which threatened the work of Fr. Terme; but the fact that they have been, for the sake of truth, narrated, encourages us to imitate those who have not feared to relate the incident told in the foregoing, and that to be told in the following, pages.

My third and chief reason is, that thus primarily is explained the plunging of Mère Thérèse into an obscurity which, in the eyes of many, was all but

disgrace. Of the spiritual aspect of this eclipse I shall speak briefly below. But it is surely due to her to point out how this kind of exile happened; or at least (for she asked no justification in the public eye) without our alluding to and even emphasising it, the hundredth part of her virtue would not be guessed.

Her energy, however, was called upon once more. It had been decided to open a house at Lyons, and every kind of pressure was, with the best intentions, brought to bear on Mère Contenet to buy one which was in every way unsuitable, except that it would provide Mlle. Jaricot with neighbours whom she liked, and that the Jesuits were so much in favour of the purchase that they and Fr. X declared that they would give up all care of the Sisters if they did not make it. I wish I dared quote fully Mme. de Larochenégly's notes, which at this point become extremely vivacious. Dickens would have fought shy of one detail she gives regarding the room which Fr. X, doubtless without seeing it, had hired for the two religious; when Fr. Renault, appalled, came to fetch them away *in a carriage*, the whole district was thrilled. As for the actual negotiations between Mme. Contenet, Mlle. Jaricot, the Jesuit Fathers, and the Cardinal Archbishop (who saved the situation with much tact and kindness, though at first he did not wish to add to the many convents at Lyons), Mère Contenet showed more clearly than ever that while she would submit at once to obedience, she had no

intention at all of accepting unauthorised interference: she listened to Superiors, but not tyrants, however high in repute for holiness. So Mme. Contenet compromised; she took the house for two years. Mère Thérèse was left there, with one other, to cope with its extreme dirt and unpreparedness. "Exile" and "captivity" are the two words which keep recurring in the pages which describe this period. Rather later on, another house, on which Mme. Contenet had as a matter of fact set her heart, was for sale. A would-be purchaser was, however, the Archbishop. Mère Thérèse, who could not get an answer from Mme. Contenet in time, though Mme. Contenet travelled all night to bring it to her, had to decide alone upon buying the house, in face of the knowledge of the opposition of the Jesuit Fathers, and the possible annoyance of the Archbishop (he was not, as a matter of fact, displeased), of the disappointment to Mlle. Jaricot, and of the universal opinion of her own incompetence for business. The event justified her; everyone was pleased; the house succeeded. Yet the hired house had not failed to make history. In it was held a retreat during which six widow ladies resolved to begin that association of laywomen for the nursing of cancer and other severe illnesses which has gained universal homage under the name of the *Dames du Calvaire*. Mère de Larochenégly was the new Superior, and from her notes (written in 1870, and almost under gunfire) we have learnt much of importance for the history of the Congre-

gation both before and after this date. I regret that I have no space to give details of the picturesque history of the Lyons foundation, in which the first Mass was said on March 10, 1844. After all, the stories of all foundations are full of exquisite minutiae. It is part of the purpose of these slight sketches to send readers to more complete accounts, where they may linger at will and savour the full value of such records. Mère de Larochenégly agrees that Mère Contenet's nerve, at this one period only, perhaps, failed her. I cannot but relate how the work was done in spite of her. She and Mère de Larochenégly went into a little jeweller's to have their crucifixes cleaned. The jeweller himself was a tiny hunchback, a sort of Quilp turned angel. His name was M. Pasquier, and Mère Contenet frankly did not pay much attention to him. Suddenly, to her amazement, he displayed an accurate knowledge of their affairs, and announced that they must on no account stay in the house selected by Mlle. Jaricot. "But," gasped the poor lady, "we cannot help ourselves. We have no money." Whereupon he roundly rated her, calling her "Woman of little faith," and from then on she began to like him. It was he, in the long run, who "rushed" the purchase of the new house, and put all the documents through in his own name, leaving, as I said, Mère Thérèse to shoulder the responsibility of somehow paying for it. But the blessing of God was on this eccentric enterprise, even though, in the new house, a workman

fell through the ceiling on to a Sister's bed, "heureusement vide à cette heure. . . ."

It is within this period that the mission of Mère Séraphie Guèze is to be placed. She was put to train the nursing Sisters of St. Philomena at Crémieux; her joyous serenity and tender sympathy with these simple girls never allowed them to guess in what physical suffering she lived, nor how much it cost her to be thus separated from her Sisters. She died on September 13, 1854, in the arms of Mère Thérèse at Lyons.

There are three points which must be made in relation to this period. To begin with, and fairly soon, a final series of exits took place. Again, though I may be wrong in surmising that the dismissals here, too, were due to the influence of Mère Anaïs, whose extraordinary power over Mère Contenet has been mentioned, there was soon practically no one left from the primitive community. I have been told that when the separation between La Louvesc and the other houses occurred, not a few of the Sisters felt that there was even then a desire to make *tabula rasa*, efface all that had been hitherto, and start afresh. The superiorship of Mme. de la V. had strengthened this idea, especially as it involved the resignation of Mère Thérèse. On any newcomer, the impression, from the Lyons period onward, would be that Mère Contenet had started everything. She had no idea of this herself, though her personal relations with Mère Thérèse seem distrustful and severe. And I daresay that Mère Anaïs was quite

unconscious of the lineshe was causing her Superior to take. It was not yet that she became aware of her own illusions, and only a very few, I think, realised that there was anything in her which was likely to work harm. As Novice-Mistress, which she was content to remain for many years, she exercised all the influence her temperament exacted without anyone observing it; it was only during her spells of vice-superiorship, during the absences of Mère Contenet, that the fantastic character of her imagination broke across the spell woven by her dazzlingly brilliant conversation. Meanwhile, Mère Thérèse became lost in a solitude more and more complete both without and within: she was not yet an old woman, yet she seemed to have sacrificed absolutely everything which had composed the substance of her happy life of yore.*

The next point is, that Mgr. Guibert, the Bishop of Viviers, who was to mean so much to the Congregation later on, now comes upon the scene, for it was he who had received the first vows of Sœur de Larochenégly at La Louvesc in 1842. He began by a definite dislike of the Cenacle, partly because it was under the direction of the Society of Jesus, and he is said to have dis-

* The Community of Lyons took the Revolution of 1848 very calmly: their house, almost alone among the religious houses of Fourvières, remained uninjured. Mère Anais, however, insisted on disguises, and Mère de Larochenégly cannot prevent herself smiling at those adopted even by the Jesuits.

approved of that Society. But gradually reciprocal amiability was established, and in the end his protection was active and continuous.

The foundation of Lyons, again, had this about it—it definitely revealed that the Cenacle was to expand and not remain at La Louvesc or even in the Vivarais. It was impossible henceforward that it should not go on to Paris.

A special interest, almost a touch of pathos, attends this foundation. Mlle. Thérèse Sophie Buchère had been admitted as long ago as 1778 to the noviciate of the Retreat-house founded by Mme. de Miramion and Père de Valois. She had to leave, through ill-health. The Revolution ruined the Retreat-house; she founded an orphanage and a home for working-girls at 11 rue du Regard; but retreats had remained her unchanged ideal. She died at eighty-seven in 1846, confiding her opes to her heir, Mlle. Thomassin. She in her turn was preparing under Fr. X's direction to enter the Cenacle noviciate, when she died suddenly of cholera. Out of her bequests to the Congregation, an establishment in Paris was to be bought. Acting, though in opposition to advice, on her own sound judgment, Mère Contenet bought 15 rue du Regard, and the place proved admirable.*

* I am bound to say that Fr. X's method of advising her against it, had been to walk a few steps ahead of her down the street, to stop opposite No. 15, and say, "Do not look at this house: it is far too fine for you." Did he remember Mère Contenet was not only a woman,

Very soon after this house was established Mère Contenet fell ill, though no one, least of all herself, feared grave danger. In particular Fr. X, though claiming that specialists should be consulted—which Mère Contenet refused—declared that it was unthinkable that she should die; that when human hope was given up, a miracle would cure her; and he was believed. The shock was all the greater when it was seen, on the night of February 24, that she was sinking. The frightened Sisters told her that they were fetching Mère Anais. “No!” she said, in a strong voice, and with her habitual air of authority. That was her last word, and when Mère Anais entered, she was dead. She had constantly asked, in her sickness, for Mère de Laroche­négly, to whom, as her opinion of Mère Anais had become, in the last year or two, quite altered, she increasingly had turned.* Mère Anais had consistently forbidden Mme. de Laroche­négly to come to Paris; but, on hearing she was asked for, she came, only to find Mère Contenet had died some hours before. Fr. X arrived too, at midnight, radiant and

but Mère Contenet . . . ? Anyhow, he was delighted when she told him she had signed the papers which made it hers.

* Contemporary notes, as well as those of Mme. de Laroche­négly, make this certain, though Fr. Longhaye (p. 88) is as positive on the other side. The only permanent infatuation was that of Fr. X. It is all the sadder that Mère Anais made Mère de Laroche­négly burn all her correspondence with Mère Contenet.

expecting, it would seem, to assist at the promised miracle: the news half killed him.

Mère Anais, as Assistant General, constituted herself interim Superior on the spot, with Fr. X's approbation. He was determined she should be elected the next Superior-General, for he was still intimately convinced that she saw visions, and even that she continued to receive orders from the spirit of Mère Contenet. He went about exhorting the Sisters to vote for "her in whom their Mother had placed her trust," and in case the elections should go wrong, persuaded them to promise one another that whoever was elected should hold office for three years only, quite against the regulations of the Cenacle. As he opened the voting papers he began to tremble so violently that he had to hand the remainder over to another priest who assisted him. Mère Anais received six votes, Mère de Larochenégly eight. Gloom brooded over her installation two days later; Fr. X insisted on calling her Mère Françoise, and not by her new title, save when he insisted several times that the authority of the Superior-General could not be greater than that of the Co-foundress, as he called Mère Anais, he being Co-founder. He invented, too, an extraordinary theory according to which the Superior-General was indeed to have executive powers, but the Co-foundress "organising powers." As Fr. Longhaye pithily puts it, the Assistant (Mère Anais) would be, as by right, "*souveraine législatrice*"; the Mother-General, her provisional *Prime*

Minister. . . . The Bishop of Viviers, Mgr. Guibert, confirmed the election, disregarding the three years' limit. Unluckily, the new Superior-General was so terrified of a schism, and so honestly devoted and grateful to Fr. X (the *Annales* and all other documents show how extraordinarily loyal and even affectionate the Sisters were to this priest who had done so much for them) that she simply did not dare to act with authority, nor even live at Paris (she settled herself at Lyons), nor to address the Community, nor to meet the Jesuits, save once, when she was very sternly treated. They were themselves divided in opinion, for Fr. X was most justly esteemed, and he led, on behalf of Mère Anais, a very active campaign. In fact, he refused so much as to visit a Cenacle again till after her death in 1871, though the Sisters begged him to do so, and even to give them their retreat. I omit the details of a rather melancholy chapter, which was concluded by the Bishop of Viviers, to whom the Archbishops of Lyons and of Paris delegated their powers, declaring once and for all that the Founder of the Cenacle was Fr. Terme, the Foundress Mère Thérèse; that Mère Contenet was not its Foundress (she would have been the last to claim that title!), nor Mère Anais Co-foundress, nor Fr. X Co-founder. Whereupon, on the very day when the Paris community were renewing their vows in presence of Mère Thérèse, who had been sent there as a kind of spiritual magnet to avert infernal lightnings, Mère Anais,

with four others, three of whom returned, took herself off, persuaded that in herself the true Cenacle was incarnate; none the less she entered several other religious communities, left them all, and established herself at last at Liesse under the shadow of Fr. X, who now was living there. She died in 1870, and her only companion entered another religious order. Her two sisters, who had entered the Cenacle with her, remained loyal, and were a source of edification till their deaths. I should like to add that the Sisters lost none of their old friends, least of all Fr. Renault; and when Mme. Anais had the audacity to petition Mgr. Dupanloup of Orleans for leave to open a house of the Congregation in his diocese, without saying she had left it, but presenting certain recommendations which were really copies of documents of a much earlier date and drawn up by Fr. X, the General of the Society of Jesus, Fr. Beckx, addressed to Mgr. Guibert a letter in which with true simplicity, dignity, and supernatural charity he made it clear that the Society had had no share in these revolts against authority, and that none of his orders, given the moment the situation was understood, had been contravened. FF. de Ravignan, de Ponlevoy, de Montézon, and, of course, FF. Renault and Félix, continued their loyal co-operation with the Cenacle. I think, in fact, that by a considerable effort of the imagination, it ought to be quite possible to see how so many experienced people were taken in. The Jesuits of Paris, for example, only heard the

version of these events which Fr. X contributed, and the esteem in which he was most rightly held was so high that he was readily believed. Now Fr. X had never known Fr. Terme, and no one, you may say, any more knew Mère Thérèse, while everyone thought that beyond all question Mère Contenet was responsible for a reconstruction of the Cenacle so complete as to be really its creation, and with equal certainty, that she put unmitigated trust in Mme. Anais, so much so that in Mme. Anais she positively survived herself. The arrival of Mère de Laroche négly seemed then a definite piece of self-intrusion, if not a schismatic enterprise on the part of the South, jealous maybe of Paris. This Sister, moreover, was so silent, both from virtue, and, I think (at this time), real fright, that Mme. Anais and Fr. X, who were far from silent, had it all their own way. The extraordinary detail is, that this very experienced guide of souls was so completely mistaken about her preternatural communications and graces. It is wonderful, too, to see how never once do the Cenacle's records falter in their gratitude to and esteem of him.

(ii)

Henceforward the Cenacle rapidly took shape, and was able to concentrate its activities. Tournon and Crémieux were abandoned in 1856; La Louvesc, Fourvières, and Paris were its three houses, of which the last became the "Mother-House" and contained the noviciate, under Mère

Dambuent as Superior. It is felt that the great development of the Paris Cenacle is chiefly due to her. It is pleasant to know that Fr. Renault, who had assisted at the infancy of the Cenacle, was now in Paris and watched over it not only during the harsh crises of its adolescence, but nurtured it to maturity, till he died in 1860. It is always with a certain regret that one watches any such enterprise as a Religious Congregation alter as time goes on, and lose the heroic, adventurous, picturesque qualities of its first beginnings. The hobbledehoy becomes tamed, combed, and washed—groomed out of recognition. . . . Well, the strong, plain voice of Fr. Renault kept echoes of the mountains, the snows, the fir-woods of La Louvesc, and the stately mansion in the Mayfair of Paris was never *spoiled out of* the spirit of those days of struggle, when peasant priests and girls toiled with tired hands at the foundations of the future. It was not till the prolongation of the great rue de Rennes made the neighbourhood intolerable, that the novices, first, were transferred in 1867 to Versailles, and in 1883 the rest of the Community to rue de la Chaise. Later, again, melancholy events sent them out of France to Brussels, and it is in the tiny hermitage at the end of the Convent garden that these lines are written, double intervention, deemed miraculous, having kept the house intact during the occupation. That intervention preserved Versailles, no less, in the terrible hours of 1870. Those parts of the house which were of general utility were

devoted to ambulance-work; the invaders looked merely at the Enclosure, bowed, and made no further move to enter it, despite their right to billet 150 men there. By a real courtesy of Providence, Mgr. Guibert became Cardinal Archbishop of Paris in time to lay the foundation-stone of the new Cenacle at Versailles.

Meanwhile the Society of the Cenacle had spread widely, though we shall give few details of its development. Mère de Larochenégly, in her twenty-five years' Generalate, opened six new houses in France, of which one, at Montpellier, had to be closed, indeed, but revived in 1895. The Society first went to Rome in 1879, and in 1883 formed its fixed home there. Cardinal Parocchi, the Vicar-General of Leo XIII., whose deep personal conviction, and appreciation of the Cenacle, he expressed, declared once and for all, when consecrating the Altar there in 1884, that while Mary in the Upper Room at Jerusalem was the true foundress of the Cenacle, and St. Francis Regis the patron of its beginnings, it must ever look back as to its earthly founder to the admirable career of Fr. Terme; and with them he thanked God that their earthly foundress was still among them, and with them, too, prayed for the preservation of so precious a life. The development of the Cenacle in Italy has been remarkable. In England, we like to add to our memories of Liverpool, that of the huge unfinished Cenacle looking down from Wavertree over the grim city; and at Manchester to remember that of those

pleasant places round about it, where lawns replace the cobbles, not all are consecrated to pleasure or even to the most legitimate aims of physical well-being, but that St. Gertrude's house is the home that has been chosen for retreats; that on Stamford Hill another Cenacle is built, to which you may climb from London—yes; but not all will *climb*. The Cenacle began low in Paris, and later on, planted itself (piquant contrast) high upon Montmartre: in London it started on the hills; we look for the day when it shall find a home, too, nearer the heart of things: and that at Grayshott, amid the incomparable Surrey scenery, so lovely as to be almost cloying in its loveliness, a fourth Cenacle has its home. To America it went in 1892; to Fribourg in Switzerland; to Tilburg, Holland, in 1905; and of its foundations in France, that which we love best to think of (after Montmartre) is the house of Paray.

The institute of the Cenacle received its customs, almost rather than its rule, from Fr. Terme, according to the spirit of St. Ignatius's own rule for his Society. On this Fr. Renault worked all his life, and the Superioress of the Roman Cenacle, Mère Sophie Estienne, put the last touches to it before her death in 1881.

In 1863, however, the Cenacle had already received its Decree of "Praise" from Rome at the solicitation of Mgr. Guibert, then Archbishop of Tours; in 1870 Pius IX. definitely approved the Society of Our Lady of the Retreat in the Cenacle,

though the Constitutions were sanctioned, not finally, but till time should have tested them. On July 23, 1886, Leo XIII. gave unreserved approval to their final form, and a concluding decree of March 17, 1891, gave it the universal and permanent character which Rome alone imparts. In addition to the giving of retreats, the duty of instructing girls and women in the Catholic faith, and also converts, is explicitly recognised.

CHAPTER IV

(i)

THIS memoir is entitled Marie Thérèse Couderc. Yet it has seemed to be about anyone and anything rather than her. Well, how could that be helped? In 1890 she was “asked to resign in favour of the soul whom God had chosen and predestined to save the Congregation.” That implied, if anything, that she as Superior was regarded as likely to destroy it; this idea was strongly *suggested* to her: “Do you not *feel* your incompetence?” When the melancholy tale of departures, of “requests to leave,” even, began, “the same verdict was all but pronounced on her.” “On m’a *gardée*” (I was *allowed* to stay), she afterwards repeated, adding, “moi qui ne suis bonne à rien” (I, the good-for-nothing). When her act at Lyons—the purchase of the Fourvières house—was accomplished, and all its significance perceived—“Et c’est vous,” cried Mère Contenet, her Superior, seizing her hands, “qui avez fait cela!” She, actually she, had had the courage for that *coup d’état* . . . ! Once more only in those forty-six years of utter obscurity, she comes, as it were, to the surface, when at the moment of the supreme crisis, Mgr. Guibert makes her temporary Superior of the Paris house, and she receives the vows of

the loyal community on the very day that the dissidents choose for their exit. Thus dramatically, at Lyons and at Paris, she who had been all-in-all, for a while, at La Louvesc, holds, for a brief flash, the field. Else, relegated systematically to the background and farther still, she was given tasks that kept her away even from recreations. Of all the nuns she was the one *not* to be presented to visitors (yet she too was the *one* whose radiance of holiness thrilled the very soul of Cardinal Lavigerie, and he asked who the nun, who had been *left out*, might be . . .); taking a vow, even, not to accept henceforward any superiority in the Congregation, offering herself to remain by preference as a lay-sister: *her* occultation might surely have seemed complete and final, and perhaps—for who could find evidence for verdict?—deserved. Authority had believed it was so: ambitious, self-opinionated, soured by humiliation, such were the adjectives they once applied to her.

How, then, did the “rehabilitation” take place? For that too is a word that from 1856 returns, more and more frequently, in the records. First let me say that in proportion as the Cenacle has understood itself, it has realised that *self-effacement* is a primary law of its life.

Looking back upon its history, it could see that every single occasion on which it had run grave risk was one where money, external activity, or desire for power had been concerned. It began with the episode of the anonymous

widow, "remplie de moyens," who invaded Aps; it continued at La Louvesc, with Sœur Ste Croix, and again where Mlle. M. came with her organising and expensive energy; it seemed to have reached a climax when Mme. de la V., from whom sheer salvation was expected, careered through a brief chapter of its history. Debts, due to the disputing of that legacy of Mère Gallet's, on which so much had depended, endangered the cordiality of the Cenacle's relations with the Society of Jesus itself; pride, and the spiritual claims, even, of Mme. Anais, all but finally wrecked the long storm-tossed vessel of the Congregation. No wonder, when America bade the newcomers do things "on a large scale" as the only way to "impress" imagination there, anxious directions from Paris were reiterated: "Do things modestly." Small wonder that that Law of Life was felt by all to be decisively formulated in Mère Thérèse's words as she lay dying:

"I ask of God that we shall never do anything out of ostentation, but that we should, on the contrary, do our good in the background (*dans l'ombre*), and that we should always regard ourselves as the least of the Church's little ones" (*les plus petites dans l'Église de Dieu*).

If that be a true ideal, if *there* be that by which the Cenacle lives, and the opposite be what it dies from, how can its members do anything *but* perceive that ideal to be utterly and unmixedly incarnate in Mère Thérèse? She personified the life-spirit of the Institute. And since life

is self-communicative, those who have most life communicate it most. Therefore in Mère Thérèse that true life of the Cenacle did not reside inert, so to say, circumscribed, confined in its consequences to her lonely self, but from her it flowed forth more than from any other; the Institute drew its life from her; all the while she was being its soul, its principle of self-good, the source of its true activity. She was not only Foundress, as foundation-stone underlies the edifice merely; I believe there are preparations which can be infused into porous stone, worm-eaten wood, buildings in danger of collapse. They permeate the weakened stuff, give it their own strength, *live in* the whole structure with pervasive power. Such was Mère Thérèse. Once the Cenacle realised what its own life was, it saw distinctly that in its Foundress that life was pure, strong, and fountainous. In her heart it sprang, and thence it *gave itself*. Of her, they lived.

Before passing farther, I must say that by this law of humility and poverty and obscurity I mean nothing merely negative. I do not suggest, for example, anything so crude as that the Cenacle's buildings should be bad, its equipment sordid. The great house of the rue du Regard was well in place. It was *to the point* they should inhabit it. What is *to the point* is never out of place. In architecture, idle decoration is always detestable. It flatters—but only an uneducated taste. On the façade of a well-known block of London flats a Titan is displayed,

straining vast muscles as under some crushing load. But what is he upholding ? He is perched at the topmost gable, and supports, I think, a chimney, or some flimsy pinnacle. He is expensive and absurd. Under the first-floor balconies, under the porch, he might be tolerable. In half the churches you enter, not only the easy job of stencilling has spattered the walls with monograms, chalices, crosses, and ears of corn, but scarcely a hassock, a curtain-rod, a money-box, but offends you with some vague uncalled-for fleur-de-lys or trefoil. For the true and simple dignity of Roman or Gothic vestments, you find substituted a kind of chasuble *aux fines herbes*, fussily embroidered. No *idle* ornament, then; no weak caresses for the senses; but austere *keeping to the point*. Therefore neither the Cenacle nor any Order vowed to poverty will fear expense *as such*. Theirs is no Vow of Parsimoniousness. They will not shirk what costs because it costs—telephones, for example, engines of most apostolic penance; nor, by confusing the flimsy with the “poor,” destroy the utility of what they have by having it second or fifth rate.

I mean, in the long run, that as long as expense and publicity are all the way through *unselfish* and *have their point*, they don't conflict with poverty. Mère Thérèse mentioned the special selfishness of ostentation. Possibly that is a Latin failing, though the New World, too, seemed, in the instance given, to accuse itself of that.

It could only ever have been, assuredly, a French porter who once asked me to change my carriage, on the grounds that the next was *mieux doré* ! An Englishman might have urged that the cushions were more comfortable . . . for comfort, rather than splendour, is our vice. While the Latin races, perhaps, may now and again beat their breasts for their tendency to the splendid, which (for splendour can be quite austere) has an “ aristocracy ” about it, yet they may rebuke us for our inclination for a certain bourgeois *bien-être*, a comfort tending almost, at times, to become crass, which, I believe, is even more harmful to the spirit of heroism than is grandeur ! The Cenacle then sins in no way against its Foundress’s ideals if it build large and solid, if what it does be good of its kind, if its equipment be up-to-date and practical; if it have watches (so to say) and not Carmelite hour-glasses; even if it advertise.

But in all that must be *one spirit*, and the word I would assign to crystallise it is *Simplicity*.

I cannot conceive of a more simplified life than that of Mère Thérèse. I do not mean by way of eliminations or amputations or annihilations of substantial parts, but by the elimination assuredly of the unnecessary, the off-the-point; and even more by the steady direction, co-ordination of everything that was in her to the centre and source of her life, the Life of her life, which was God. In nearly all the Saints, all “ active ” Saints perhaps, their union with and work for God expressed itself in some particular *way*—some

special devotion, the creation and fostering of an Order, the writing of books, or doing one work rather than another. In her, not so; and yet she is not featureless! yet she is not, as it were, shapeless; she could not be mistaken for any other, I imagine, of God's servants, nor do I know of any very like her, save one, perhaps, of whom I hope to write some day.

That she was not impersonal is abundantly certain. She was by birth a peasant, and she knew and remembered it. "Nous sommes une *famille* de paysans," she exclaimed, when a nephew came to fix himself at Lyons. She feared for him the enervating atmosphere of towns. Not alone in work did that continue to express itself—she worked all day, even when tired out; she dug; she pruned; she stitched and stitched at sheets and mattresses and petticoats. Even the thirst for prayer, she affirmed, should not distract one from working; nor could she understand idleness, or an imperfect work that augured carelessness in others. "She was not easy-going," I was assured. "Quand elle donnait du travail à faire—et bien! il *fallait le faire!*" Her tendency was to walk very fast, and to make nothing of a staircase. When she was pleased with a thing, she was apt to rush off to tell her Superior the good news, and had to check herself—it could wait till recreation! Everyone is agreed how till the very end her sound country-woman's sense would flash forth in conversation. "*Sa verdeur d'esprit*" is an expression so many have

used to me ! Alas that but few of her words have lasted for quotation ! Yet, perhaps not " alas." So much depends on the occasion, the manner, the tone, the glance, if the tiny epigrams of every day are to impress us ! " L'on désire la mort, et l'on a peur du tonnerre !" she said, with kindly malice, to a young Sister who " yearned to be dissolved," but was scared by a thunderclap. " She works too much; she writes too much," she once cried at recreation of a certain Superior, who was not present. " The affairs of the Congregation would go none the worse if she took a little rest." And she reproached herself sincerely for that sincerity of comment ! To the end she had the most definite views about all that went on; she was most observant; she talked very little, yet all were astonished, when she *did* speak, to find how keen, loving, and detailed an interest she had taken in all that they were trying to do or doing; she found it a continual struggle when decisions were reached with which she could not agree; she had not only a clear personal idea of what the Cenacle *ought* to do, as we see from the representations which from time to time and with extreme humility and trusting resolutely in the Holy Spirit's guidance she made to her Superiors, but she was able to affirm what had been Fr. Terme's own unrealised ideas and hopes and to tell Mgr. Guibert that in this point or in that Fr. Terme had not had time to see his thought materialised (*de réaliser sa pensée*). In fact, she was passionately devoted to the

Institute; so much so, that her anguish when the house at Montpellier refused to flourish and even had to be closed (she was there for its duration, and, indeed, fell sick there and received the Last Sacraments), was a revelation to herself: she had learnt to shoulder her personal private cross, but not yet fully could she bear to see the Cenacle suffer. She felt it must be her faults which brought this failure on the house. Yet all her life she had schooled herself not to *will* the continuance of the Cenacle—sprung no one knew whence, save from the will of God; faring no one knew whither, save His wisdom and His will—should God not desire it; and when, in 1880, the whole religious life in France seemed threatened, she beyond all the others stayed serene. She prayed daily that God would save *her* soul and *His* work.

You can surmise, then, that this woman, who suffered not at all just *selfishly*, when she was thrust aside, happy and happier in her isolation, though needing to pray daily for her perseverance, *did* suffer most terribly when she saw—I will not say, the work itself endangered; that goes without saying—but that she herself not only was judged to be unworthy of sharing it (for so she judged herself, in advance), but of even trying to share in it. Profoundly convinced that its essence was the giving of retreats, she saw herself considered unfit even to attempt to give one. I shall return to this idea: she was happy in her isolation, but suffered in her happiness: her joy had the pains of Purgatory.

She took, towards pacification, the shortest cut—" *se livrer* "—the giving of one's self over, the utter giving of one's self over to God: it is hard to find a brief English phrase which shall quite exhaust the meaning of the French.

" God has so many methods of uniting Himself to souls that He does it when He pleases and as He pleases, and we are therefore right to leave Him free to act and to give ourselves over to His divine guidance. . . . I am always coming back to this holy self-abandonment, to this mercy which—how happily!—is infinite. And then go on in peace. . . . Often already had Our Lord made me understand how useful it is for a soul . . . to give itself over without reserve to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. But this morning it pleased His divine loving-kindness to give me, further, a quite special view of this. I was preparing to begin my meditation when I heard the sound of all the bells calling the faithful to the divine mysteries. At that moment I desired to unite myself to all the Masses that were being said, and to that effect I directed my intention so as to participate in all of them. Then I saw in a sort of general vision the whole Catholic universe and a multitude of altars where the adorable Victim was being at one and the same time offered." She could not conceive how the whole world was not forthwith sanctified. And, seeing the ungenerous response of souls to the divine solicitation, the words *se livrer* recurred to her. "The supreme method of entering on the path of perfection and of sanctity is to give one's whole self over. I grasp the whole sweep of the meaning of that phrase—to give one's self over; but explain it I cannot. I know only that that sweep

is very wide, and embraces both past and future. To give one's self *over* is more than *giving* one's self; it is even more than to abandon one's self to God [she uses the word *s'abandonner*]. To give one's self over is, in short, to die to everything and to one's self; never to give self a thought save to keep it ever turned towards God. To make one's self over is, again, to seek one's self no more in anything, neither in spiritual things nor in temporal—that is, no more to seek self-satisfaction, but only God's good pleasure. I might also add that making one's self over is, too, that spirit of detachment which clings to nothing, neither persons, nor things, nor times, nor places. It is to adhere to all, to accept all, to submit to all. Do not [she continues] fancy that is too hard; do it once, courageously, and then remember you have done it. And the sweetness of it, and of God's consequent communication of Himself to your soul, is indescribable and the only true peace."

I would have it felt, first, that this attitude of will is not somehow inhuman, chill, and, as it were, empty of detailed loves. Mère Thérèse was a child, all her life, in her devotions. She exulted to look out, from Fourvières, over Lyons when on great feasts of Mary the whole town was illuminated. "*Comme elle est glorifiée !*" she would cry. Did she mean Our Lady, or the city? Both, perhaps; she personified the town; it sang—like the fields and valleys in the Psalms—one radiant hymn to God. She put, on Fridays and Saturdays, statues of Our Lord and of His Mother in the Superior's place at table (like St. Teresa,

who set Our Lady in the Prioress's stall); and they were always served first and of course best, and the food went to Their poor. Possibly it was her own childlike soul which so made her love the feasts of Christmas and all the Holy childhood. On Christmas Eve she followed the Holy Family about, from one inn to another, till once towards midnight she was heard to sigh exhaustedly, "*Il est bien temps que cela finisse.*" She loved, no wonder, "the good holy workman" St. Joseph, and the house at Lyons did much to spread devotion to him, and, again like St. Teresa, never failed of his help. With this simplicity went very solid sense. She felt people misunderstood the Portiuncula devotion. They seemed to put in the first place the gaining of a number of indulgences. She would so much have preferred *one*, sought carefully and well! And she could not bear ever new prayers, composed to keep pace with novenas. Say the old ones better! Even—to us this seems incredible; but at that date our evidence was not hers—she was long reluctant to believe in La Salette and Lourdes; and—it was bold, I own!—set Our Lady a simple miracle to perform *if she had indeed appeared there*. Our Lady granted it.

Nor did the total resignation of self I mentioned always exclude the most tender, detailed prayers. She wished that the portress should be careful to pray for each visitor, that the Sisters should pray for the workmen so seldom for long together out of the house. When, as once happened, she acted as ambulance Sister at Fourvières, each

bandage, each sponging, had its accompanying prayer. So tender was her compassion that while she pursued, assuredly, the sufferers she had heard of with a tenacity of remembrance which astonished even those who had *asked* they should be prayed for, she did not dare *picture* vividly to herself those whom she was recommending to God, for too exact a vision of them distracted her from Him. Yet ask she did, with great simplicity; the prayer of petition was ever on her lips.

Perhaps I ought, if I say that, to anticipate somewhat, and insist that *with* this fragmentary, explicit prayer, so to call it, coexisted the deeper habitual processes of her union with God, as the ripples of a sea interfere not at all with the massive movements of its tides. There are those who can accumulate "acts" of the love of God, and *count* how often they have prayed to Him, in a day or an hour; the life of the late Fr. William Doyle is full of instances of this sanctified arithmetic. Mère Thérèse could not find help in that. In bed, at work, at chapel, the flow of her soul was continuous; it seemed "natural" to her to say: "I make my morning meditation all day long. . . . I think of the Glory of God. . . . Of the glory we can give Him. . . ." The *Pater* and the *Gloria*, at such times, supplied her with all the words she needed. "I unite myself," she said, "Lord Jesus, to Thy perpetual, unceasing, and universal sacrifice." After a retreat, she had sought to obey a director who bade the Community mark down, for "particular examen,"

the number of times they had put themselves, each half-day, in God's presence. She could not do it: she tried: but having once placed herself, at the day's outset, in God's presence, she could not leave it. "Prayer is *the element* in which a religious lives."

To return to her method of self-offering. For a Christian, no argument is required, when Christ has set example. Therefore, since the whole of Our Lord's life was one of self-oblation, and a most intimate giving over to God of a perfect human will in sacrifice, while that sacrifice was, by divine decree, attached to, as it were, and consummated in the Passion, in Gethsemane and on the Cross, so for a Christian, whatever be the joy of self-tradition, pain will certainly not be left out; nor will he wish it to be, but will wish it *not to be*, lest he be not co-crucified with Christ, co-nailed to His cross, marked with every one of the stigmata of Jesus. It was rare, then, that Mère Thérèse failed to feel her life of self-offering as a sacrifice, as a "holocaust," a "whole burnt-offering," of which the very ashes were scattered to the winds, so utterly did the Sanctity of God deserve that all should be His, as those old holocausts well symbolised. There were two levels of suffering in her life, each, so to put it, itself having two levels. There was an initial amount of physical hardship which absolutely defeats modern imagination. There is plenty of misery among the "submerged" nowadays; but I doubt if there is worse than what Mère

Thérèse and her companions went through in those earliest times. Later, there was sickness; there was bad rheumatism, crippling her till it was agony to kneel and worse to rise; grave deafness, terrible headaches, and suffocation. This was but the concluding phase of a progressive weakening which was not, I expect, just physical: it had a psychic element, and Mère Thérèse's illnesses were a sort of recurrent collapse which marked that the whole governing faculty of her psychic life was, for the while, exhausted. But in this was no *spiritual* collapse.

In the middle part of her life, again, there came the humiliations we have spoken of, on which I think I need dwell no more. She could herself only once—save, I daresay, in Confession—be brought to speak of them, when she was asked to dictate some notes about the earlier history of the Congregation; and even then she regretted having said so much. Another time, having related her memories, when told to, she refused even to read through the *Annales* into which they were worked, in their completed form, but that was no doubt chiefly because she knew she would be spoken of with praise there. If she *had* to speak of those who had caused the troubles, there was never once an accent of bitterness in her words: everywhere she detected a soul of good intention in the most ill-seeming action (and I confess that there seems little doubt that the good intention was practically always there); when she had been called on to speak of things ill

done, she added: " But it is years since I have seen those dear Sisters, and all that time they must have been working at themselves, and have acquired the virtues which had not yet showed themselves exteriorly "; and she thanked God sincerely that *she* had not been submitted to tests such as another had endured, and under which she felt that she might well have succumbed. And I find it full of a true pathos to read that once when she had been told to describe the talents and aptitudes of her Community, she felt bound to add: " To complete my note on their characters, I ought not to forget to mention my own; but I find it almost impossible to define it: my character is undecided, lazy, cowardly, and has neither stability nor courage; besides that, I am easily scared (*sauvage*: like a wild animal, afraid of contact with human creatures), diffident, inclined to melancholy and downheartedness. Of talents I can say nothing; I have none: as to education, I never received any: virtues I have none. You will guess the rest, Father: your instruction will supply what I can neither say nor write." It was a joy to her to get away from the " I "; she regarded it, as we have seen, as meant so to be put at the service of her fellows and of God, as to be remembered only in view of *them*. She had no self-love, *even spiritual*.

But all this humiliation having its source in human creatures, herself or others, stood to the anguish which reached her, she felt, direct from God, as her mere physical outward labour stood

to her sicknesses. All the last part of her life, especially when her "rehabilitation" was proceeding apace, was plunged into an interior desolation she had never experienced during the years of struggle. To this she owed, despite to the very end obeying the order to *admit* no "terrifying truths," no thoughts that might depress her. I will quote only one sentence of her own about her pain; for after all, she spoke but little about anything, and least of all about this part of her experience, and when she did, naturally her sentences were brief, such as any holy person schools himself to say.

"I am experiencing," she said, "a crushing disgust of spirit, a sadness from which nothing can distract me, fears and alarms which make me shudder, distastes that I feel I never can conquer; so much that I often suspect it must be the evil spirit who has won mastery within me."

Nor, we are told, was this a passing phase. Her whole nature seemed to be crushed and ground down thus, for the last fifteen years of her life. We are told that her face, despite what I can only call its majesty, had, in the hours when the agony was acute, an expression of sadness utterly beyond what human anguish will scar upon a countenance; all her life she had had for favourite devotion the Way of the Cross; now she seemed to make it all the day long: she was so deaf, and also so absorbed, that she did not hear herself speak, nor sob; as a rule, while she knelt in the chapel, the tears flowed steadily from her closed

eyes, but at times her sobs were terrible; and terrible, yet somehow sweet, was it to hear her say, as she moved about, her *Seigneur, ayez pitié*.

In holy souls, such pain is purifying. The vast simplification proceeds more rapidly than ever. We cannot wonder, then, that she who made all her suffering *apostolic*, who never once ceased to remember that she was in her own self filling up what was lacking in Christ's pains, for the souls for whom He died, should have come to be in intimate and continual touch with the souls in Purgatory. She was one of themselves. . . . I will recall again how, before he knew anything at all about her, Fr. Garrold, whose intuition I was ready to trust, exclaimed on seeing her portrait exactly *that*—"This is a soul in Purgatory!" She believed herself to see and hear them, to be awakened by them again and again till she had prayed for them, and the strange murmur of their thronging presence left her to sleep again.

"Since yesterday," she once told her Superior, "I have been surrounded by a multitude that prays without any interruption, praying with a thrilling voice, with a reverence beyond any comparison at all with anything I have known. And they sing, too, the hymns and the psalms and the prayers of the liturgy to a solemn music; they implore, they sigh, they adore the Divine Majesty with an unspeakable unanimity, and harmony, and faith, and hope, and love. I think they are the souls in Purgatory. . . . They are suffering, and express their pain in a heart-

rending way. I would wish to be freed from them: I ask this from Our Lord, but He does not hear me."

"Last night I could not sleep. They never left me. I saw some of our Sisters among them, and many priests and religious. When I received Holy Communion this morning, they chanted the *Te Deum*; at the fourth verse, in spite of my efforts to attend as usual to Our Lord, I had to follow them, and sing with them, *Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus, Dominus Deus Sabaoth*. . . . I had to follow then to the very end; it was wonderful: long as I may live I shall never forget that harmony, that tone, that reverence of which nothing earthly can give you any notion. Each verse was sung with a feeling suited to the praise or the entreaty it expresses. When they came to the last verse, *In te, Domine, speravi; non confundar in aeternum*, they said it at least ten times, with a humility and intensity and confidence that were full of love. . . . How they pray! How they sing! Oh, if we could but pray like them! How gross and indecent is our way of praying compared with theirs! Where is our reverence?"

Lest, then, there should be the slightest fear on the part of those who may read, later on, all that can be quoted from her, that perhaps she loved suffering for its own sake—for indeed she *embraced* her cross—or thought meanly of the body—for indeed she was heard to rejoice that it should suffer: "What else does it exist for?"—they must remember that all her suffering was thought of and valued by her only as *within the Christian scheme*: the whole of it was undergone by her as

by part of Christ's mystical body: she was in Him and He in her; and if His Three Hours' Agony lasted in her for thrice ten years, she was but grateful to have the long chance of proving her loyalty to Him. On the Cross, if you will, but with Him upon it.

Therefore in all things direct to Christ she went, "marchant droit devant elle," and, it was said, "looking neither to right nor left," and with perfect equilibrium. "All was simple in her and around her, like Truth itself," a Sister wrote.

"We have Our Lord," was the sum total of her wisdom. "We have willed naught but Him; we seek Him only. From Him let us beg our sanctification, yet not for us, but for Him. Ours be the joy of praising Him, blessing Him, glorifying Him. Be sad? How should that be, when in the centre of our heart we possess Him who is the Angels' joy."

"In the centre of her heart." It is the old reply. Many a Saint has asked, after some hour of frightful loneliness in temptation: "Where wast Thou, Lord?" "In the very centre of thy heart."

So towards the end of her long life she moved, united so closely to her God that none who came near her failed to see Him looking through her grave eyes, and hear His accents in her "grave, kind voice." For this gravity and this kindness were what all seem to have first observed in her, her incomparable recollection, and her unfailing sweetness. For what are we to use, in our

language, for the beautiful, rich word *bonté*? It is more than goodness, than kindness, than benignity. More nearly is it that old English word we cannot use, now, except of God—God's loving kindliness, His *tender mercies*. In the days when she still feared lest her peasant-like downrightness might offend or hurt, she had prayed for *amabilité*, to be amiable, to be felt as affectionate. She received better, receiving *bonté*.

"I saw that word," she said once, after Communion, "as though written in golden letters—'loving-kindness!' I repeated it again and again, and it was sweet indescribably. I saw it written on all creatures, all, inanimate, rational or not—on all. And what I have told you now is nothing. What is divine will not yield itself up in words."

Let me then leave her thus: She so saw God as to spend her life in *reverencing* Him; she so saw creatures as in them to see His goodness, and so in them served Him. Thus simplified, she moved, undeviating, to her goal.

(ii)

From the end of 1873 she began definitely to weaken, and in 1885 she received once more the Last Sacraments, but recovered somewhat.

Her Superior had asked her if she thought her illness would be prolonged.

"I don't think about it," she said. "I know nothing of it. When I was younger I once had a great desire to die. Our Lord made me understand then that it would not be granted so soon.

During my prayer I felt as if I had been taken into a wood and was following a track that appeared to have no end. I went on walking, walking, without stopping, and never could I see the end. I felt my life would be like that."

Although her pain was appalling, and when questioned she never disguised it, yet she was able to send and to help two of the Sisters to die. The Community were praying that the Sanctuary Lamp might not yet be extinguished.

But on August 8, 1885, she said to her Superior that she was more ill than they thought, and needed the Last Sacraments. A pathetic little scruple distressed her: she had received Communion that morning: would it seem strange if she received it again, that night, as Viaticum? Her anxiety was calmed, and she whose whole life had been a long Communion, who, though she had cried, "We should receive Communion thrice a day, were we but able," yet knew herself so continuously *in* communion that she would refrain from having the Blessed Sacrament brought to her bed unless some other sick Sister were to receive It too,* received her Guest again.

Her mind remained clear; her memory, always marvellous, lost nothing it had held. But she was not, for the most part, remembering or thinking. "*Something great* is happening," said the watching Sisters. "We cannot understand it." And the same note recurs: she weeps—"Ask God

* "*Je n'aime pas,*" she said, with a flash of the old vivacity, "*que le bon Dieu voyage dans la maison à cause de moi !*"

not to send me more pain than I can bear"; yet, a Sister said, "What strikes me more than all else, is her loving kindness. . . . I feel that the eyes of Our Lord look across hers, and pierce into my soul. . . ." It still was Christ in agony: "Nothing that I shall ever be able to say will give you an idea of what it is when she says, 'My God, have pity on me!' 'Pray for us,' they asked. 'I will, if God suffers me to speak to Him: ask Him to receive me into His mercy.'" The Holy Souls flocked round her: she was told not to fear: "They are the friends of God, for they love Him, and He loves them. I am in good company."

When she was about to leave this earth, and receive upon her soul the last imprint of that resemblance to Our Lord Jesus Christ that the Adorable Trinity willed to place upon her, before her admission to the bliss of eternal union with her Beloved and her God, her Superiors asked her to say what was her hope for the Congregation which she had founded and to which she gave her life. Then it was that she commended to it that humility and simplicity of which I spoke above.

On the morning of Saturday, September 26, 1885, she made her Last Communion, but did not speak, and in the evening, about a quarter-past four, she opened her eyes, which were clear and peaceful, and looked towards the bottom of the bed. Then she closed them again, and the majesty of her habitual recollection fell back upon her. Then she died, aged eighty years, seven months, and twenty days.

CHAPTER V

I NEED, then, say little more. The Society which Mère Coudere founded is composed, strictly, of the choir Sisters, but its coadjutor-Sisters have the same vows and participate in the same spiritual privileges. After the first probation, which differs in length with individuals, the noviciate is begun and lasts two years. At the end of the first year the habit is given, and at the end of the second the three vows of religion are taken, at first for five years only. After a third probation of six months, during which the Sisters make St. Ignatius's Exercises for a full month, the final and perpetual vows are taken, and a promise of teaching Christian doctrine is made. Professed choir Sisters recite the complete Office, and daily Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament from Mass to evening was spontaneously granted to them by Leo XIII. Their direct aim is to teach Christian doctrine to all classes of girls and women, and to give, or assist in giving, retreats. The Sisters keep the enclosure.

It would seem true to say that whatever is substantial in Christian doctrine is a permanent fact in the Church. Thus, the eternal word of God became flesh; and for ever the Church is the mystical body of Jesus Christ. Our Lord died

on the Cross for our salvation; and for ever the same Sacrifice is offered, everywhere, in the Mass. And there is a sense in which we may go farther, and assert that any constructive episode in the Church's history, in a mysterious sense, endures. We are apt to think much of the Life of Our Lord on earth, both before and after His Resurrection; and we are accustomed to brood upon Church history from the day of Pentecost onwards. But great is our loss if we forget to meditate on that Interspace, as it were, between two worlds, when Our Lady and the Apostles lived silent in the Cenacle, and waited. During that time, there were assuredly two Persons on whom our attention should be concentrated: Our Lord Himself, invisible, speaking no word that human ear might catch; and Mary, Teacher alike and taught. For from none, as from her, could the Apostles learn so much: and yet not she had been appointed Apostle by her Son; it would be hers, once they went forth beneath the Spirit's guarantee, to hear, even to obey.

The inner life of that Cenacle has poured itself forward into the centuries, and is a permanent reality. Yet it may be felt that in the Cenacles of to-day, it is reproduced under a less disguise than, perhaps, anywhere else. Since the great expansion of the devotion to the Sacred Heart—that is, to the Divine Love of God veiled yet made manifest in flesh—the Cenacle has most rightly had its house at Paray-le-Monial. But since the permission for daily Exposition, the Cenacle is

left in no doubt whatever as to the source from which it must draw its life. The Eternal Son of God, hidden twice over, invisible even in His humanity, but present in His enduring Sacrament, is at the centre of this Congregation's day. And from the outset, these women, just because women, are intimately associated with Our Lady, and, through the work they are vowed to do, uniquely associated to the Apostles. And daily they invoke, by a special prayer, the Holy Spirit.

Doubt, then, we cannot, that what happened in the Cenacle at Jerusalem happens, in due measure, in these. Jesus, Mary, the Apostles, are present and are forming those they have summoned to their sides; and, better than in the first days of that interspace of waiting, the Holy Ghost is already and specially present, and His Fire and Wind are all the day long discernible.

But what is alive always reproduces itself; and the life of the Jerusalem Cenacle is renewed, not only in the Convents called by that name, but through them, in the souls that come to them. For their essential work, retreat-giving, is capable of making Cenacles of such souls too—that is, of fostering in them an interior life of which the source is the Holy Spirit of God.

With all the good-will in the world, it is hard not to see in our country, and in others, a certain dissipation of life; I mean, not merely lives which dissipate their energies, but an interior weakening of the very power of living human-wise—that is, of holding in the mind clear thoughts, and using

them to govern instincts, and to produce the work of men and women in the world; even, to make for one's self a world at all—a place of ordered energy, with a goal for the attainment of which means are chosen and regularly applied.

Now a retreat affords first and foremost—and looking at it quite unsupernaturally, you may say—the opportunity of clearing one's ideas and putting them in order. It may be impossible for a man to have a *wholly* false idea; it would be so strictly nonsense that he might be unable to tolerate it. No one could keep up, for a moment, the idea that a circle is a square. But he may so colour up and distort his ideas, or so dilute and impoverish them, that they are of but little service, and may be harmful; for example, the ideas of self and of God are true; but there is no difficulty in seeing how often people decorate the idea of their “self” in such fantastic ways as to make it, in practice, more false than true. They build into their self-consciousness a mass of extraneous stuff which makes the impression of their self-hood quite misleading. It governs them still, but governs them awry; they think of themselves as brilliant or stupid or impressive or despicable, whereas they are average. Probably it is as hard as anything can be, to form a quite truthful judgment of one's self, because that means seeing yourself in true proportions, in perspective, and implies that one sees other things in their right perspective too—and it is hard enough to be *quite* right even about them! In proportion as one gets this compre-

hensive "relative" view, one obtains the requisite substratum for humility; no wonder, then, that this is, perhaps, the hardest of all virtues to achieve. Few people, now, perhaps, have a very false idea of God, because, precisely, they have no very clear idea of God at all. There are pagans, doubtless, who still put into God a great deal that is not there (though really all such additions are subtractions; I mean, if a pagan thinks God is *numerous*, and that there are many gods, he is taking from his idea of God the far richer element of Divine Simplicity and Unity, and so forth); and there were heretics who dressed up their true idea of God with horrible attributes, such as cruelty, like old-fashioned Calvinists. But, on the whole, we dilute our idea of God nowadays; we see practically nothing in it; and in consequence it cannot *work*. It must be again and again insisted that our country has lost its clear idea of God; it is not atheist, but its God is spectral, a wraith of a god, coloured at best with lurid tints of anger or of grudge, and provoking fear and vague dislike as our response. In a retreat, then, a terribly *stripping* process goes forward; the illusions which had clouded up so dense around the Reality that *they* seemed substances are ruthlessly driven away: in a retreat I find my Self, and I find God. Hence the superb power of St. Ignatius's first theme: it is simply the disentangling of the true notion of our Self and the true idea of God, and the confronting of the one by the other. And for success therein,

no better help could possibly be sought than hers who was utterly stripped of everything extraneous, and never once built up a false self out of dreams or wishes, but remained *true* all through, "reverencing God."

And along with the frightful confusion of mind which results from not being clear about the only two ultimate realities which exist for each of us, Self and God, has come, as you might expect, inability to act, or at least to act in any coherent and forceful way, and even to want to. Hence the appalling frivolity of behaviour no less than of mind, which we cannot but observe. Hence an unparalleled (I think) instability in good. Hence both that inability to do even what is surmised to be right or even to *want* to be able to do it, and also those apostasies, the sudden, baffling collapses of faith and morals where you never expected it, the sudden evaporation of what seemed conviction, the abrupt liquefactions of what looked like character. Fatigue? In a sense, yes. But we all know how our fatigue often feels at its worst precisely when we are doing nothing. Begin to work, begin even to play, and you cease to be tired. The will *feels* weak when it *is* not will-ing. Choose to choose, and you find yourself powerful. Now, the theory that ideas are thin, phantasmal affairs, a kind of steam thrown off by massive surging instincts which are described as the deepest things in us and alone powerful and "responsible" for what we are and do, must be categorically denied, and is, in fact, being

less and less proclaimed by modern psychology. Ideas are the functioning of a far deeper fact than instinct—namely, our intelligence; it is they that are powerful, they that are “dynamic,” precisely in proportion as they are true. When they are seen clearly as true, at once they *work*, and put order into instinct, and rule the life. Hence the reposefulness of a properly made retreat—not a repose like the delicious languor induced by some Turkish bath, nor even that intermediate relaxation of the muscles following hard exercise, which portends increase of health and activity in the future, but the sense of readiness for action; that the will is freed for activity—that is, choosing; indeed, the glad spontaneous instinct passing into a choice of what you now see to be good. And again, whose help could we better seek than hers who was seen to be so thoroughly *character*, personality, that there was no need to see anything else about her? What else, in fact, was there to see? She never did anything; she never was allowed to do anything; she scarcely spoke; yet suddenly they all woke up to the recognition that *she* is the alive one; she is the vital source; they are living on her; round her the Cenacle is grouped; better still, she is its soul, as I said; its principle of life, giving all the time because so inexhaustible.

It would be easy to illustrate, page after page, our letting go of clear ideas, and our consequent inability to will, and our inevitable collapse back into the swaying, shapeless region of blind unresisting instinct; or how we choose, if choose we

do, the easier thing only; and our tendency to rest content always with the more superficial view. Even among Catholics, this *dilution* of personality is visible: unless they courageously resist it, even they, in the natural order, "lose their souls"—that is, dissipate and disintegrate their selves; and if they do that, with them true civilisation perishes, since this is nothing but the orderly association of healthy selves. Its opposite is chaos, and welter, and real "beastliness."

But, without arguing the point, we may assert that mankind is meant to use its ideas *incarnate*, and ought to live off persons, so to say, rather than naked thoughts. We applaud and admire philosophers; even theologians in the long run depend on them, but philosophy and theology are meant, after all, to help us to manage life—to construe our natural life and to appropriate and develop a supernatural one and to enjoy its consummation. And life for us means persons. Therefore, no doubt, the Word took flesh. Now, for millions of our fellow-men, Our Lord Jesus Christ has faded into a memory, or has ceased to be even that. The whole of our modern successes could be tossed into the sea and forgotten, if we might take in exchange that personal attitude towards the Person, Jesus Christ, which the Middle Ages possessed. Even Catholics, once more, have run the risk of weakening their old grip on Our Lord. Were not the Protestant sects intrinsically weak for other reasons, we might well envy some of their members, at some moments, at any rate,

for their vivid realisation that to "cling to Christ" is all that matters. At least they not only know a great deal about Him, but they visualise Him as present and put no meaning into their religious efforts save as appropriation of Himself. It is true that as long as we go to Holy Communion we cannot *but* be in contact with Our Lord, and He acts on us independently, spontaneously; the reception of the Blessed Sacrament works *ex opere operato*, from His end of the transaction, so to say, and not merely owing to our good efforts. But if we cease to *care about* Our Lord, we shall cease to *want* to go to Communion, or to assist at Mass. Mass will become a function; and Communion entirely too great an effort for us to make. The overwhelming attractiveness of Jesus, sufficient to cause us to walk miles to meet Him, to feel not irked that we "have" to make our duties, or to attend Mass, but terribly disappointed if by some chance we cannot manage Mass, or have to omit Communion, that is what, in our modern world, it is so hard to be aware of. In a retreat the history of Jesus is not alone rehearsed, but brooded on; and not His history alone, but His personal society is as it were thrust upon us. And where He comes, He brings with Him all that His Heart contains; all of its human sympathy, its wise tenderness, its strength. "Heart of Christ, set me on fire," Mère Thérèse used to add to the *Anima Christi*: "That won't spoil the prayer," she would say, smiling. And she who used to trudge for hours through snow to reach Com-

munion assuredly found a welcome. The isolation goes; the miserable dwindling of self, when it feeds only upon self, is checked. Development, expansion, begins: Communion is not so much a thing you do, as a thing you are.

Finally, its inmates *left* the Cenacle, and left it as *Apostles*, and as the Church. Freemasons have asked me: " Shall I find, if I sacrifice Freemasonry and become a Catholic, that material help and good-fellowship I have experienced heretofore ?" Had we to single out one characteristic whereby to describe the Jews, it would have to be their national *cohesiveness*, their sense of solidarity. . . . No guild, no nationalism, no racial unity, can compare with the supernatural unity of the Mystical Body of Christ that is the Church. In a retreat, at last, the transcendent unitive element in the Church reveals itself. Social barriers, caste, wealth, disappear automatically, and the millionaire knows himself equal, in Christ, with the miner; and the professor with the athlete or the soldier; the duke with the docker. That sense of fraternity in Christ was known, once more, to the Middle Ages. Feudalism existed *within* Christendom: the real link, throughout society, was the Faith. We want to have snobbishness scourged out of us! That we should dare, we Catholics, to linger upon " differences " when in the inmost and alone enduring thing we are identical! At each end, we are one; in nature, and in super-nature; and God help us if we are so *uneducated* as to be unable to discern, even in the

roughest human nature, enough to put us on our knees. But God help us, not now only, but in eternity, if we disregard that unity which exists between us all through Christ who is our life, and if we admit for one instant into our hearts the Satanic sin of contempt of Christ's Body, or of one cell, even, in that living tissue; of any one, even, of our fellow-Catholics.

But again and again, no living thing *can* live, without acting, without enlarging, reproducing itself. I take for granted all wise things that can be said about prudence, discretion, and toleration. I can go on then to say, that the Catholic is bewildering, who asks but to lie low, who has no instinct to communicate his privileges. There are those who go to dinner-parties, and return quite glad that no one guessed that they were Catholics; congratulating themselves on having got out of some tight corner with success; of having skated gracefully over thin ice; of having displayed tact. We dislike and deprecate, of course, ostentation, bombast, intrusiveness; much can best be done by just *being* the right thing. But if one doesn't *want* to give the good thing one possesses, *that* is symptomatic! It is probably due to one's not really feeling that it is good. "Of course, I never mention religion." "I wouldn't dream of alluding to these things in public." Why not? One would be keen to if it were a new novel one had discovered, an infallible drug, an ideal dressmaker, or a quite special restaurant—unless, indeed, one were so convinced it were *so* good, that vanity

yielded to the monopolising instinct, and one were even keener to keep one's discovery to one's self. . . . The retort seems to be: "Ah, but everyone would *want* to know those things! They *don't* want my religion." Well, does one *want* them to want? *Hope* they will offer one the chance to do what one is shy of beginning? Keep on the lookout for opportunities? Let no one say there *are* no opportunities! For souls eager to do His work, God makes the opportunities. And here are two principles, of which the second admits of no discussion: all men in their hearts *do* want the Catholic Faith; and, God wants all men to want it. It may well be that God does not want *me* to give the Faith *now* to this person or that. Then the direct opportunity will not offer itself; that is true. If I try to force the situation, I shall create trouble. But who knows what *remote* preparation for the full Faith I am not being called upon to afford? Whether *some* amount of truth or affection is not being asked of me, which shall make easier access for clearer light and knowledge? Let us say this, at any rate: it would be strange were God *not* asking each one of His favoured few, His privileged minority, to do something on behalf of souls who do not share their prerogative of faith. It were all but incredible were God to say to anyone: "You possess all, and you need transmit nothing. You have received much, but it is *not*, for you, 'more blessed' still to give." No; He does not say that; it remains

that no one should ever leave a Catholic with whom he has consorted without its being *easier* for him to become a Catholic himself. Woe to us indeed if we give scandal, put stumbling-blocks in the road of souls; but woe, too, if we just add indeed no obstacle, yet lend no helping hand. Indeed, such refusal *is* an obstacle, for to receive no help from one who can and ought to give it chills, disheartens, dissociates.

If, then, in this hour of our huge responsibility, we are conscious that we believe in God, but that He makes no practical difference to us; that we acknowledge Our Lord as God's Son made man for our sake, and yet stand in no personal relation to Him; that we have not the *Catholic sense*, which makes us at once fraternal to our neighbours just because they *are* Catholics, and, in a paradoxical way, doubly so when they are not, and just because of that; then is assuredly the moment to examine our conscience shrewdly, and to seek, if we are wise, by means of a retreat, to clear up our beliefs, that their truth may become powerful. Enter the Cenacle, if necessary, on your very knees; leave it Apostles, full of the Holy Ghost.

No less firmly than we believe St. Margaret Mary to have been chosen by God for a unique mission, and for the re-revealing to a frozen or fevered world the Human Love of God, we must believe that to Mère Thérèse He entrusted the duty of calling Catholics to retreat. For many, the road to a retreat-house may be the road to nothing

less than sanity; only by the vigorous revivifying of their weakened life-principles may they, perchance, be capable of keeping their personalities together in a distracted world; for others, only so may their associated life, their home and environment be kept worthy of the name of Christian and Catholic; for very many, without any doubt, only so will they achieve an apostolic spirit and work the work of Christ by whose life they profess to live.

It will be seen, then, that I attribute no magical effect to retreats, nor do I speak of them as if making a retreat were a thing in itself, a closed event, a meritorious action which on the whole is itself and but secondarily its consequences (if indeed there are any such events or actions). A retreat has its natural and its supernatural coefficients; the supernatural one is, as always, God's grace, and when we have said that He gives it with lavish generosity in a retreat we have said what we could proceed to illustrate at very great length, but of which we could scarcely give any *special* explanation here, since evidently Grace is the same at all times, being the supernatural "one-ing" of the soul with God. But of a retreat in its natural aspect we would say that no method in the world (if it be but properly applied) can be conceived more directly and more downright scientifically adapted for giving, in the first instance, the personality a chance. Much as children even in the slums are (they keep telling us) on the whole born healthy, and grow up under

pressure of miserable environment (physical and moral) into the rickety creatures we see, so we need have no doubt that (short of physical malformations, sheer brain-defects, which make of the body an instrument so spoilt that the soul in no circumstances can perfectly work through it) human creatures are born mentally and morally *apt, able* to grow up into rich and strong personalities; and for that they need, still speaking on the natural plane, little more than a constant interior *freeing*. Socrates was not wholly right when he said that everything depended on a man having right ideas, because, he argued, no one ever chose what he saw and knew to be wrong, but that the mind always represented to itself what it adhered to as good. But it is quite certain that the sheer freeing of the mind from illusions, and the putting order into the truths it then is conscious of (and you may say they fall *into* order, create their harmony, the moment they are thus freed) by the very law of the mind itself at once frees the will from its inferior attachments and sets it active and productive. Even so, we are speaking half in metaphors; the personality is one; the intellect does not require to be cleared up first, and then to present as it were a row of true ideas for the will to proceed to act upon, but *I*, whose principle of life is spirit, need but to be *able to live* properly in order at once to begin doing so. I know that the essential mystery of freewill remains, and that while we cannot act without a motive, we can choose to attend to this

motive or that, and choose wrong even when we know better. But *at least* the clearing up of ideas enables us to *see* the right motive; and the establishment, the fixing of the right ideas, keeps the right motive present, and supplies us with principle and purpose. Hence continually we hear from men in retreat: "I never thought of that before!" "I never looked at it *like that*!" This passes into: "That never struck me till now"; "That never *meant* anything to me yet"; and then, by way of sheer slang, if you like, "*Now* I can get a move on," followed by the soul's glad stretching itself, feeling its muscles, feeling vitality circulate anew, and grow strong, and the tendency forthwith to do too much. Hence the care needed when a retreatant starts to "make resolutions." We can never fully achieve all that we shall see, in a retreat, to be possible and desirable; here you at once mark the value of the Catholic distinction between sins mortal and venial; venial sins and imperfections; commands and counsels: not *everything possible* is *commanded* to a soul, nor is everything that may some day be achieved, counselled *now*; but retreats *do* issue into resolutions, steady applications of the will to what our principles offer as good and desirable.

It may be said that the topic of retreats need not, in this book, be laboured. It is true that not Mère Thérèse, nor even St. Ignatius, invented them. In a way they are too obviously reasonable in themselves for them to have been a product of any one imagination. But St. Ignatius's Exercises

gave the whole idea a unique impetus, and also, for those who care to use it, a scheme and shape which it would be difficult to better. However, even he did not found his Society *only* for the giving of retreats. But Mère Thérèse's Congregation was, if not quite wholly, at least primarily for that. In this it was a quite original creation. Retreat-giving was the *idée mère* of Fr. Terme. Mère Thérèse affirmed this, and she less than anyone was likely to *invent*. A Congregation, then, has been explicitly approved by Rome, and given thereby, as I said, permanence and universality, of which the scope is to give retreats. That is enough to convince us of their importance.

And it is a Congregation of women. Women give the retreats. This assuredly is astonishing.

And yet it should not be so. It is true that priests give the large general retreats in Cenacle convents. But the Sisters themselves are constantly giving them to individuals, without, of course, encroaching on definitely sacerdotal duties, nor seeking from the women who make retreats an account of conscience, or what not.

And here we see a very high sanction given to the assertion that well-instructed Catholics should be ready to instruct. If in one hyphenated word we had to designate one of the two or three chief needs of England, and even of Europe, and even of foreign missions, we should say, Lay-Catechists.

Let us assume that in any Catholic community we ought to be able to count, reasonably, all things considered, on a certain average of priests. Even

were they all forthcoming, even were they all as active as priests should be, they could not possibly cope properly with all the work. I would say, not even with all the Catholics. I will be brief, and say, first, that in big towns where Catholics swarm, as in Liverpool or Glasgow, priests can scarcely even see all their folks, and can never see many of them often. In such towns, too, there are prisons, barracks, hospitals, and other large institutions. Often their chaplain is a priest already occupied in mission-work. Yet every Catholic in such places ought to be positively hedged with Catholic care and tendence. If it is hard, in the homes of workers, even to find their occupants in, let alone reach them all in the shrunken spaces of time when they *are* in, it is correspondingly easy to reach men and women in hospitals or prisons or barracks. It is intolerable to hear from such folks that no Catholic has ever "looked them up" even at Christmas. But often the priest *cannot* do it, or cannot see them *all* and *often*. He may have to gnash his teeth at the idea that the unique opportunity of influencing such lives *has* to elude his efforts. He will weep hot tears at the thought that even one man in a hospital leaves it without having had the Sacraments. He will know with certainty that a rapid race round the wards will do no good; yet more he cannot do. He will be sure that the men will not make elaborate inquiries as to where the church is, and struggle to *discover* him—yet what can he do? He cannot fire off guns at his

presbytery door all day and rockets all night. He knows that a long time, tender tact, wise affection are needed to captivate precisely those souls who are certain *not* to come, and for which Christ says the shepherd leaves the ninety-nine righteous—not even safe in the fold, but “there in the wilderness.” The priest might be ready to scramble down any precipice to find the wounded, stupefied sheep, but he need not be just excusing himself if he says he simply has not time.

Very well, the laity must be able and accustomed to do the preliminaries *for* him.

And in the country it is worse. For in most of our big villages there *is* no priest. But I speak not without instances that I could quote to support my generalisation, when I say it is my belief that in all our large villages there are submerged Catholics often by the score. I know one such where a Catholic settled and opened a chapel in a barn precisely *because*, on the map, it was clear there was no church near, and it was assumed there were no Catholics there. In next to no time a score of Catholics were found, ready and glad to practise their faith; a large number, alas! who from long non-practice had lost all desire for the Catholic life, and whose children were all baptised as Protestants; and also a fair number of inquirers ready for instruction. I know that regional priests, motor missions, and the like, attempt to cope with such situations; but their visits are meteoric, even when they recur; continuity of action is impossible, especially con-

tinuous instruction is impossible. And I go farther : it is rare that there is not *some* Catholic household accessible, of which the occupants possess bicycles, if not motor-cars, and are educated. Now I say that their intellectual education has failed, if they *cannot* impart Catholic instruction—can't teach the Catechism; and that their moral education has failed if they don't want to. Xavier's lay-catechists taught the faith so that it held good for generations in Japan; a missionary of great zeal and much experience, Fr. T. Gavan Duffy, repeats and repeats the cry that without lay-catechists the evangelisation of India is hopeless.

Now we may say that the retreats given by the Cenacle convents are instruction *in excelsis*. At any rate instruction forms a great part of them; and we have been astonished to note how relished are *instructional* retreats (and sermons) when the instructor understands the minds and feelings of those whom he or she addresses. This whole mass of work, then, instruction in and out of retreats, *must* be given, if enough of it is to be given, by others than priests, and of such givers, a high percentage must be women. For perhaps they have more time on their hands, and in many cases they do it better than men do. I fancy there is much that women can say to women, and have said to them, that men cannot.

A superb work then lies open to all those who will go to retreat-houses and look forth from them with eyes enlightened and hearts fired by the Holy

Ghost. Whether you see twinkling beneath you the innumerable lights of Liverpool or hear the reverberating roar of Manchester, or whether you strain your eyes from Grayshott over the rich de-Catholicised loveliness of Surrey, or whether from Stamford Hill you feel the whole frightful problem of London rise up and beat its bat's wings on your face, be sure that a work is being offered you, and that if only the spirit of the Upper Room is strong within you you can do it.

I have not hesitated to conclude thus, by the emphasising of a practical work, the history of Mère Thérèse, which I would rather have left to teach us, as it taught her contemporaries, by its intrinsic power.

APPENDIX

I

The Act of Oblation made by Fr. Terme in 1832

AU nom de la très-Ste. et très-adorable Trinité, Père, Fils et St. Esprit, moi, Jean-Pierre-Etienne Terme, prêtre et indigne ministre de Jésus-Christ mon Sauveur, très infidèle serviteur de la Mère de mon Jésus, devant la très-haute, très-puissante et très-auguste Reine des Anges et des hommes, la divine Marie, en présence de St. Régis et de toute la cour céleste, je reconnais humblement et sincèrement que la maison habitée à la Louvesc par les Srs. de St. Régis, ne m'appartient point; que c'est à tort que les hommes croient que j'en suis le propriétaire, à cause sans doute que la vente de son emplacement et de ses environs se trouve passée en mon nom. Mais je déclare ici, toujours en présence de la cour céleste et sous les yeux de J.-C., que ce n'est pas moi qui l'ai fait bâtir, que ce n'est pas de mon argent que j'ai payé les ouvriers, que je ne sais pas même comment tout cela s'est fait; je suis tout étonné qu'on ait pris un si vaste plan, ce n'est pas moi qui l'ai tracé. Je ne comprends

pas comment, sans argent, sans aucune ressource, on a eu la hardiesse d'acheter un emplacement fort cher, de faire amasser des matériaux et en grande quantité, appeler au chantier un grand nombre d'ouvriers. Et ce que je comprends encore moins, c'est que tous ces ouvriers aient été bien payés et bien contents, qu'ils aient même fait de bonnes affaires. Je dois à la vérité de dire ici, que non seulement je n'avais rien, mais que je devais encore beaucoup pour la maison d'Aps. Qui donc a fait la maison de la Louvesc, appelée de St. Régis ? Vous vous trompez, vous tous qui vous figurez que c'est l'abbé Terme du Plagnal. Et pour dire toute la vérité, je ne connais point d'homme qui ait fait bâtir cette maison, et je crois franchement que les hommes n'y sont pour rien.

Mais plusieurs prétendent que les filles qui l'habitent sont riches et qu'elles ont apporté des sommes d'argent; autre erreur, elles sont toutes pauvres aux yeux de ceux qui les connaissent. Les plus riches n'ont pas donné seulement 2,000 francs; il n'y en a qu'une qui ait donné 1,600 francs. Les autres ont bien moins donné, le plus grand nombre n'ont rien donné du tout; plusieurs même n'ont pas payé leur pension, et à quelques-unes il a fallu faire le trousseau. Il est d'ailleurs de toute évidence que le travail que font la plupart dans la maison ne pourrait pas les nourrir, encore moins les entretenir. Et cependant toutes y sont mieux habillées, mieux nourries que ne l'était J.-C., que ne le sont au-

jourd'hui dans le monde un très-grand nombre de pauvres de J.-C., un grand nombre même de religieuses.

Oui, mon Dieu, je reconnais qu'il est de toute évidence que c'est la votre œuvre, que c'est votre divine Providence qui a bâti, qui a meublé cette maison; c'est votre divine Providence qui nourrit, qui habille les personnes qui l'habitent. En sorte que les meubles dont on fait usage, les habits dont on s'y revêt, le pain qu'on y mange sont aussi sûrement un présent de votre main, qui l'était la manne dont vous avez nourri votre peuple pendant 40 ans dans le désert. Pour venir tout à la fois, au lieu de jour par jour, il n'en est pas moins miraculeux le pain que l'on y mange. Et quoique leurs vêtements s'usent, qu'est ce que cela fait, puisque vous leur donnez aussitôt le moyen d'en faire d'autres ?

O Marie, O ma Mère, c'est par vous que tous ces biens nous sont donnés, puisque vous êtes la trésorière du ciel. J'en fais ici de nouveau la déclaration, O divine Reine, cette maison ne m'appartient pas, elle est à vous par toutes sortes de titres; et si ceux que l'opinion des hommes me prête pouvaient être de quelque valeur ou avoir quelque réalité, je vous les cède, je vous les transmets, je m'en dépouille librement et avec plaisir autant qu'avec justice. Je vous donne autant que j'en ai le droit, car elle vous appartient mieux qu'à moi, je vous donne purement et simplement, mais irrévocablement et pour l'éternité, cette maison avec toutes ses

dépendances, soit à la Louvesc, soit ailleurs, ne voulant rien réserver, pas même une aiguillée de fil, ni y prétendre à rien. Je vous consacre de même toutes les filles qui l'habitent, et je ne veux plus qu'elles m'appellent Père si elles ne sont pas vos filles de cœur et d'âme, et si elles ne vous sont pas irrévocablement soumises. . . .

Et s'il est bien vrai que je sois leur Supérieur dans la foi et leur Père en J.-C., dès ce moment je vous établis, vous institue leur Supérieure générale. Je vous prie d'accepter cet office pour l'amour de J.-C., pour la gloire de Dieu le Père dont vous êtes la fille bien-aimée, en l'honneur du St. Esprit dont vous êtes l'épouse chérie. Recevez-les toutes sans exception sous votre gouvernement céleste, celles qui sont à la Louvesc comme celles qui sont à Aps, à Mayres, au Plagnal, à Lespéron, à la Mastre, à St. Pal, à Valvignères. Je vous donne et vous som mets avec la même affection mes chères filles venues de Lyons, qu'elles soient aussi à vous pour toujours.

O ma Mère, je ne vous ai rien dit de moi-même, mais vous savez et vous connaissez mes besoins; vous savez que je suis un pauvre prêtre, et combien les prêtres ont plus besoin de miséricorde. O ma tendre Mère, ce ne sera pas en vain que je vous aurai appelée *Mère de miséricorde*.

Si j'osais vous prier de présenter nos biens, nos personnes à Jésus votre divin Fils et le prier de nous recevoir tous en sacrifice d'amende honorable pour réparer les outrages faits à son amour, à son cœur, par les sacrilèges et toutes

sortes de profanations, etc. C'est dans ces vues, j'ose bien vous le dire, O ma Mère ! que nous vous avons tout donné ; que la Supérieure s'est déposée pour que toutes ses filles devenues orphelines vous choisissent pour leur Supérieure. Mais vous seul pouvez nous obtenir l'insigne faveur d'aimer votre Jésus, de compâtrir à votre Jésus outragé par les sacrilèges, d'arracher votre Jésus des mains des profanateurs ; et pour vous prouver que toutes mes filles entrent et persévèrent avec moi dans la reconnaissance de ces vérités, elles signent ici avec le plus petit et le plus indigne de vos serviteurs.

J. P. E. TERME, PRÊTRE

II

*A Letter from Fr. Terme to Mlle. Jaricot
(undated)*

MA CHÈRE SŒUR EN JÉSUS-CHRIST,

Veillez considérer ceci devant Jésus et le peser selon qu'il vous l'inspirera.

Vous voulez faire donner des retraites, je le pèse aussi. Je ne peux rien et vous avez abondamment toutes les ressources qu'il vous faut. Mais si cela plaît à Jésus et à Marie je vous offre au nom de Marie la maison de la Louvesc et vous ne prendrez que celles des sœurs qui seront

jugées utiles aux retraites par nos pères jésuites; je me charge de retirer les autres et de les employer ailleurs, je pourrais peut-être même employer quelqu'une des vôtres. Quant au costume je m'en rapporta [*sic*] et elles s'en rapporteront à tout ce que vous réglerez à cet égard avec les Pères. Pour la règle c'est celle de St. Ignace et comme ce n'est pas une règle nouvelle je pense que les MM. de l'Archévéché n'opposeront pas de difficultés.

Avec tout cela je vous promets des vocations en grand nombre et des sujets distingués, par leur piété, leur éducation et leurs talents, pour de l'argent il y en aura abondamment pour étendre l'œuvre de Dieu et je suis sûr de cela. Mais voyez s'il est impossible que vous y donniez la main.

D'autre part ne nous abusons pas, il nous faut des pères et nous en aurons pour diriger les retraitantes dans le tribunal et par ce qu'on appelle plus particulièrement, *direction* intérieure; mais nous n'en aurons pas pour donner continuellement les exercices aux femmes; et d'ailleurs cela ne pourrait se faire qu'en public, et cette manière de faire retraite est connue et pratiquée, mais ce n'est pas faire la retraite à la St. Ignace qui veut qu'on propose à chaque âme ce qui lui convient selon le temps, les besoins et la capacité de son esprit. Ceci ne peut se faire qu'en particulier et pour les femmes il fait que cela se fasse par les femmes. Qu'on ne dise pas qu'on ne trouvera pas des personnes capables de donner ces retraites

à chaque âme selon ses besoins. Dieu veut que cela se fasse déjà combien s'en trouvera-t-il qu'il remplira de son esprit parmi les nombreuses jeunes personnes à qui il inspire dans ce moment le goût de cette vocation !

Ne comptez pas non plus trop sur les Dames du — —. Je sais qu'il entre dans le but de leur vocation de donner des retraites. Mais cette fin de leur institut n'est guère pratiquée qu'à Chambéry où il y a par la grâce de Dieu une maîtresse femme pour les retraites. Elles ne reçoivent pour les retraites comme pour l'éducation que les personnes du haut parage. Or Jésus et St. Ignace ont eu en vue tout le monde et les Saints Jésuites se sont sanctifiés non à la cour ni auprès des grands, mais en travaillant au milieu des pauvres dans les campagnes. Voyez St. Xavier, St. Régis le bienheureux de Hieronimo parmi les Lazaronni [*sic*] de Naples, etc., etc.

Je crois qu'il entre grandement dans les desseins de Dieu que vous lui recommandiez cette affaire aux cœurs de Jésus et de Marie.

Priez les bien et faites les prier pour moi.

III

*F. Haon to Mlle. Jaricot*20 X^{bre} 1834.

MADEMOISELLE,

Vous aimiez M. Terme, vous aviez la bonté de lui donner de bons conseils. Eh bien, il n'est plus de ce monde, il est décédé à l'issue d'une mission, le 12 de ce mois dans un endroit appelé le Plagnal, n'ayant été malade que peu de jours. C'était un bon prêtre tout brûlant de l'amour de Dieu et du salut des âmes. Mais comme Dieu juge les justices même, veuillez, je vous prie, très-vertueuse demoiselle, prier et faire prier pour lui.

Ce bon prêtre qui était mon grand ami, que j'aimais comme un autre moi-même, que je pleurerai tout ma vie, vous était bien attaché et bien dévoué; que de prières ne fit il pas faire pour vous, lors de votre longue maladie de 1831. Que je plains ses chères filles; que deviendront elles après une perte semblable.

Si j'osais vous supplier de les prendre sous votre protection, de les aider de vos sages conseils, de leur servir de mère, qu'elles seraient heureuses; quel soulagement dans leur grand malheur? Depuis que vous avez eu la bonté de prier pour moi je dis chaque jour la Ste. Messe, je vous supplie de me continuer cette faveur-là. Aurez-vous la bonté de m'honorer d'une réponse? J'aime bien vos lettres et vos conseils: j'ai le cœur gros

de douleur. Daignez agréer mes hommages bien sincères avec lesquels j'ai l'honneur d'être, très-vertueuse demoiselle,

Votre très-humble

et très-sincère,

HAON, PRÊTRE.

Veillez offrir mes respects à vos vertueuses filles que j'ai eu l'honneur de connaître à La Louvesc en 1831.

IV

Mme. Thérèse's Letter announcing her Resignation of the Superiorship

LA LOUVESC,

26 octobre 1838.

MES BIEN-AIMÉES,

La divine Providence qui pourvoit toujours si à propos à nos besoins, vient de nous accorder une nouvelle marque de ses soins paternels, en nous donnant, et à vous toutes et à moi, une Mère digne de toute notre estime et de toute notre confiance, dans la personne de Mme. de la V. Je suis bien aise de vous annoncer moi-même, mes bien-chères Sœurs, cette nomination, de la part de Monseigneur qui l'a approuvée.

J'ai la douce confiance que vous apprendrez toute cette nouvelle avec plaisir, et que vous regardez dès aujourd'hui Madame de la V. comme votre bonne Mère. Vous connaissez d'ailleurs tout

l'intérêt et toute l'affection qu'elle a bien voulu nous honorer; il faut nous efforcer, mes chères Sœurs, d'y répondre de notre mieux, en lui allégeant, s'il nous est possible, le fardeau de la supériorité par notre soumission, notre respect et notre zèle, surtout par notre perfection. Il est temps, enfin, de travailler à devenir de bonnes religieuses, le moment est venu. Je connais, mes chères Sœurs, vos désirs et votre bonne volonté, et je compte sur vos excellentes dispositions d'esprit et de cœur.

Priez pour moi, mes bonnes Sœurs; je le fais pour vous, et suis avec un sincère attachement.

Votre très-humble,

MARIE THÉRÈSE COUDERC.



MARIE THÉRÈSE DE SOUBIRAN

AND

MARIE ELISABETH DE LUPPÉ

NIHIL OBSTAT:

GEORGIUS JOYCE, S.J.,

Censor Deputatus.

IMPRIMATUR:

EDM. CAN. SURMONT,

Vicarius Generalis.

WESTMONASTERII,

Die 10 Novembris, 1921.

INTRODUCTION

WHEN I was asked by the Religious of the Society of Marie Auxiliatrice to write the life of their Foundress, I made an answer which I am now almost inclined to regret. I said that I thought such "lives" ought to be very short, and that most biographies of members of religious Congregations were full of a number of minute details which had nothing personal about them, and of "moral" generalities which could scarcely interest the ordinary reader. I asked permission to make a short sketch, and to group it with another in the *Household of God* series. However, the more I studied the history of the two women you will read of here, the more convinced I felt that they ought to be written of at full length. And I most earnestly beg the Religious of Marie Auxiliatrice to make sure that not only a life of their Foundress, but a history of their Society, and perhaps a special account of Villepinte, and, above all, the *Spiritual Notes of Mère Marie-Thérèse*, be made accessible to English readers. I have used the *Fondatrice des Sœurs de Marie Auxiliatrice*, by the Abbé Théloz (Lyons, 1894),

a wonderfully sane and wisely religious book, in conjunction with Père Grivet's quite delightful work, *Marie-Elisabeth de Luppé* (Lyons, 1910); but while the latter cannot be understood without the former, it contains much which supplements and even explains the earlier work. It will be seen, then, that a *mere* translation of either or both would be inadequate. Besides, I doubt if a translation of any French book ever quite suits an English taste. I have, however, had, too, at my disposal, the *Spiritual Notes of Mère Marie-Thérèse*, with which are bound up several letters and some other documents. May I say once and for all that I have found in this book some spiritual reading which, to my personal appreciation, is unique. In it you achieve (or so I feel) direct contact with a human—a very human—soul, and with God. I cannot exaggerate what these Notes have meant to me; and once more I beg that those to whom they properly belong should see to it that they be supplemented, if possible, and given forth generously to the Catholic world.

In asking this I know what I *am* asking. In no less than three places, in those Notes, Marie-Thérèse relates her exit, not to say expulsion, from the Society she founded. The Sister who asked me to write this sketch spontaneously broached that subject. She wished the story to be told fully, since it had already been so narrated in the French lives, since it was a true event, and since, both she and I felt sure, it was a

tale which, in its entirety, gives great glory to God. Perhaps in the whole of it no one did deliberate moral wrong, though many a mistake was made. I shall have to speak of the mistakes made by Marie-Thérèse herself; and of those made by others at, so to say, her expense. I try to explain *why* she made her own: and how, after all, at worst they issued, spiritually, into imperfections merely of heroic virtues, and then into means of making those virtues perfect. Would that we were within measurable distance, even, of those imperfections! And she suffered at the hands of her uncle, Canon de Soubiran, of Fr. Ginhac her director, and of her assistant, Mère Marie-Françoise. I hope that I shall show the old Canon to have been severe indeed, and quaint, almost absurd at times, in his immediate aims and methods, but noble of heart, utterly unselfish, and in the long run lovable. Those who knew Fr. Ginhac are at one in their admiration of his great virtue, and, again, in the long run, believers in his loveliness. Of the assistant, I find we can think well without *affected* charity. She, too, had flaws in her virtue—alas, who has not? Hers do not endear her to us, as Mère Marie-Thérèse's do: but can there be a greater tragedy than to realise, at last, you have failed *both* in the supernatural *and* in the natural order? And, please God, hers was no final failure, any more than Marie-Thérèse's was.

The same religious told me frankly of a would-be postulant who, on reading the French

life, declared she never would join an Order where such things happened. Poor child ! I can but think she had little knowledge of God's ways, and none of human nature. God does not produce His servants, finished Saints, from the cradle. A girl might well spend her whole life thanking God for the very permission to call Marie-Thérèse de Soubiran her Mother: a heart that suffered what hers did has room and understanding for every suffering heart: and if God calls, further, any girl to share Marie-Thérèse's work, and to *help* the world as she did, that is a vocation so high and glorious that an eternity of gratitude will not be too much.

C. C. MARTINDALE, S.J.

OXFORD, 1921.

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Marie Thérèse de Soubiran

(MAY 16, 1834—JUNE 7, 1889)

(i)

IN the splendid pedigree of Sophie de Soubiran the names of Elzéar de Sabran, and of his wife Delphine, have a special splendour. They are invoked as Saints. Into this pedigree there entered memories of a different roll of honour; in 1780 M. de Soubiran de la Louvière married a descendant of Montcalm, whose part in the heroic history of Quebec England herself need not fear to venerate. There were five children: three sons and two daughters. A fourth son was born in Spain, whither the Revolution had driven the parents and their boys. The three elder lads entered the Spanish Navy, and two died, breaking their mother's heart. The youngest of these three, Joseph, remained in Spain; so M. de Soubiran returned with only Louis to estates shrunk from an enormous acreage to next to nothing. His elder daughter had died too, and after a while Louis was ordained priest. Joseph became head of the family after his father's death, and served in the French Army till the Revolution of 1830 forced him to resign. He had married Mlle. Noémi de Gélis, granddaughter of the

Marquis de Beaufort, who was shot at Quiberon in 1795. She left a family where life was extremely brilliant, with, for background, a wise austerity; her mother had said to the eager child: "My little Noémi shall not make her first communion till she shall have learnt to say 'As you please' to everybody!"

The austerity remained to support her in her husband's grim house at Castelnaudary, where assuredly support was needed. Here, on May 16, 1834, Sophie de Soubiran was born. We in whose eyes the Parisian mirage glitters rarely guess how severe can be, even to-day, a young girl's life in the homes of French provincial nobility. In the early nineteenth century, its severity was often enough extreme; and yet, I doubt if life was less happy! In Castelnaudary the great gates of the courtyard opened but rarely: within, you passed through tall doors into rooms tapestried or panelled, empty save for the necessary furniture, magnificent, heavy, oaken. A chapel faced you as you entered, dark and Gothic; M. de Soubiran was president of a men's society that met there.

Four children had been born to M. and Mme. de Soubiran: all had died; it seemed as though they were to grow old companioned only by Joseph's sister, Mlle. Sophie, who had remained unmarried and absorbed in pious works, and Louis, now a Canon and later Vicar-General of Carcassonne. The little Sophie herself, when three years old, seemed doomed, and was, in fact,

at death's door from typhoid. At the last moment they place the scapular upon her; she recovers, and is vowed to Mary. When she was eleven, she made her first communion, begged God to call her to the religious life, and felt thenceforward, she writes, a shrinking from marriage and a contempt for the world's pleasures. Hitherto her spiritual life had been but "average." At twelve, in the first retreat she made, she felt the touch of God's *love*; and again in a retreat next year. Her communions, first weekly, were now made twice or thrice a week, though, she declares, she was "lazy and far too sensitive." On November 21, 1847, she made a temporary vow of virginity, which in her heart she determined should be perpetual, and passed these years in studying the Life of Our Lord, so that prayer became easy and continuous, and she learnt to care for nothing save for Him. "Sorrows," she says, "coming to me from persons very dear to me"* increased her love for God so intensely that she could write, long after, that she was nearer to Him then than later, and that she has learnt, since then, nothing new. She did but pass deeper into the Divine intimacy.

She flung herself into the work of an association of the young girls of Castelnau-dary, which numbered some 500. Its founder, Abbé Dulignon, had been sandbagged by some young men from

* She must allude, I think, to the marriage of her favourite aunt, whom thenceforward she could see but little.

whose seduction the association had saved their victims: Canon de Soubiran succeeded him. The Canon had all his brother's austerity, if not more, and a sort of symmetrical mind which revealed itself from his views on art up to his practice of a most exact justice. But through the severest mask—I will say, the iron mask, the veritable visor—shone the kindest eyes; and the tremulous maidens whom, Sunday by Sunday, he bade repeat, from a little pulpit opposite his own, his instruction on dogma or on morals, found it none too hard to love him, and returned gladly after vespers for games in the cloistered garden. Yes, they came gladly—despite the sacrifice of even the least frivolous *toilettes*, exacted by the terrible Director, to whom, as he sat in his little hut, delinquents were summoned one by one. He kept them standing there interminable minutes, and then looked at them. . . . Quite enough. Regularity was restored. How shall I hope to persuade a modern maiden that they “came gladly”? Oh, but they did! There is bullying and bullying. One cowers or infuriates; the other is felt bracing, honestly tonic, formative, saving one's soul from that shapelessness which is worse even than a contour for a while too rigid! Our great-aunts who wore backboards did become both alert and graceful, and lived to be the loveliest old ladies! It is much, too, to be saved from spiritual flopping. . . .

But Sophie de Soubiran, under her uncle's direction, not only became a real centre for the

girls belonging to the Congregation, but entered deeper and deeper into the understanding of what giving oneself altogether to God implied. Let me speak frankly. In reading her life, even without the assistance of her Notes, I have felt as though I entered *at once* into an atmosphere of holiness. In other histories, that impression takes long to accumulate. Perhaps her portrait, placed as frontispiece both to biography and Notes, helped somewhat by its childlike charm and the contrasting sadness of its eyes. I cannot tell in what year it was taken; it might be almost any age; except for its eyes I am sure half those who saw it would choose "bonny" for its right description—in it she seems so round and sensible, with her delightful mouth over her dimpled chin, and her nose (unless in profile it looked different) so—well, so quite unaristocratic! But through her eyes, like that other Marie-Thérèse, Foundress of the Cenacle, she gazes at the world and its strange sins and sorrows from the immense distance into which her sinless sorrow has called her; yet, even so, Mère-Thérèse Coudere seems to me a very *Mater Dolorosa*; Marie-Thérèse de Soubiran has remained, somehow, a child right into those sad years. Therefore, I feel that one would be wrong to surmise that the appalling tragedy of her later years caused her to look back with idealising love to her girlhood, and that her Notes are no true transcript of what happened. I think she really *was* happy in her friendship with the Heart of Jesus and His Mother; that she really

did understand the joy of spiritual work for others, the invigoration of obedience and of complete self-abnegation; that she prayed long, studied seriously, put a cross of planks in her bed, dressed almost like a peasant, wore clumsy shoes on feet she found so pretty when shod with satin. . . . Yes! she had real pleasure in their prettiness—all this seems half-natural in her environment and with her responsive temperament. And it is not this, I feel, that creates that atmosphere of *holiness*, nor even that she rose at night to pray, and that her adoring maid begged leave to rise too and pray with her . . . the impression springs from deeper, and defies analysis.

But I find in her two tendencies, coexistent, yet divergent; and without God's grace, that reaches "from end to end" strongly yet sweetly, they might have broken her spirit on a rack. Under her uncle's severe schooling, and perhaps her father's, she took the quite definite resolution "to keep my soul in readiness to believe that I was *always wrong*, at the very first word that anyone in authority might say to me . . . herein, I exaggerated; I realised that later." The other seemed to her to be the origin of this, but was, as keener critics have seen, due itself to another feature of her schooling. These very stern tutors were well aware of the theory of Jansenism—that the good we do is *wholly* due to God's overmastering grace, and that our will counts for little—in fact, nothing—in our right action. They guarded

against this, and in their very severity emphasised the importance of free choice and resolution. So she thought that you could succeed simply by willing to; she believed in the possibility of a virtue that should *never* falter. It came to this: she was told, "You must choose right, and you always can"; and her energy leapt to the challenge. When she failed, she condemned herself. Then they told her, "You are continually doing wrong," and she felt it must be true, and that her will was *always* a guilty coward, and she reduplicated her self-condemnation. She thought she could do more than she could, and that she did less than she did.

This was a harsh trial for so lonely a girl of scarcely seventeen.

(ii)

Sophie de Soubiran began to hope for Carmel.* But she felt she would never go there, and her uncle and other persons whose advice she valued, and the direction she received during a retreat, forbade her to hope for it. Besides, her uncle had a plan. He wanted to establish in France those singular settlements which are known as

* Much later on she gives as her reasons: That she might possess God without distraction; and that she might be under constant guidance, as she needed to react vigorously against a soft, sensitive, impressionable temperament, which tended in consequence to extremes of diffidence or of self-confidence.

béguinages, and flourish best in Belgium. In a perfect village of little houses, ladies who feel no definitely monastic vocation, and do not wish to remain unmarried, imperilled, and perhaps inconvenient, in the "world," spend peaceful and pious days, working, praying, and observing a rule adaptable, within due limits, to health and consciences. The atmosphere of such places can be very sweet and reasonable, and they can fulfil a true function. M. de Soubiran informed his niece that he wished her to start such a *béguinage* at Castelnaudary, and was infinitely shocked to find she loathed the whole idea, which, in fact, cannot be thought very suitable to France, still less to Southern France, and least of all to souls anxious for Mount Carmel. However, accustomed to think herself always in the wrong, she went to Ghent in the company of her uncle and of the priest who had directed her in yet another retreat. "They will be your two angel-guardians," had said the Bishop of Carcassonne. "They will be useless," she answered gravely, "if God is not with me." The poor child returned clear that she must obey—clearer still, because of her father's sudden death. Lover at all points of the *ancien régime*, averse to innovations, he would have opposed the new foundation.* Sophie returned to Belgium, made her noviciate

* As he lay dying, in his brief but violent pain, he said: "Why weep? You know I do not belong *down here*. One must go forth into one's eternity." After that the austere old man spoke no more.

at Ghent, and came back to France in 1854. This year, she says frankly, had been the unhappiest of her life thus far. Even thereafter, peace and joy visited her but by flashes. To begin the life of a *béguine* seemed to her the collapse, perhaps for ever, of all her hopes: she doubted her perseverance, and felt sure that, should she leave, no religious Order would accept her; she might be expelled for ever—she might be expelling herself—from the only destiny that seemed tolerable. She insists, in her Notes, that she foresaw, with what proved to be a terrible accuracy, the ultimate tragedy of her life. However, *within* the conflict, the wrangle of the “Two Voices” in her soul, resided a new peace: at least she was trying with all her heart not to follow her own will; and that was well towards the probability that she was following God’s.

On August 8, 1854, she left home, and began the irksome long-drawn sacrifice; and she and her companions received the religious habit on November 14, 1855.

From the outset the settlement developed quite unlike a *béguinage*. Not only did M. de Soubiran guide the Sisters in a rather academically penitential way—and after all he had no training to be a Superior of nuns, let alone quasi-nuns—but the amount of physical discomfort endured by the Sisters was much above the normal. They got recruits, and building had to go forward. Not only had they to embroider, and sell their work to pay off the masons’ bills, but they had to

get up at three, and do much of the building with their own hands, breakfasting long afterwards on dry bread. When they were more settled, they took in a certain number of poor children to educate. They called them *Enfants de la Préservation*, and did real rescue work.

Anecdotes worthy of the heroic age have come down to us. The Sisters manufactured also a liqueur. Now a certain little nun, Marie-Blandine, had charge of it. Marie-Blandine was an altogether delightful person. She was a peasant girl of Castelnauudary and had belonged to the association I described. There she met Sophie de Soubiran, and fell forthwith in love with that saintly young princess. Jenny Escudier (that was her real name) attached herself so firmly to her adored, that she had to be accepted in the Soubirans' house as maid. (I think it was she who used to rise at night, when her young mistress did, to pray.) This maiden was ardent and impetuous. Her method of descending stairs suggested avalanches. She took them four at a time when reascending. They called her "Grande Vitesse," and she did indeed fling herself through life like any express train, never halting at what checks most people. All her endeavours at self-discipline—poor child! she tied her feet loosely together to regulate her steps—did no more than infuse a certain gentle sweetness into her frenzy for hard work; and she never lost her gaiety, her frankness, her complete self-offering to other folks' convenience, and her

sharp peasant's wit. Her death was devout, practical, and very swift. "The express!" they whispered, smiling at the memory, when all was over. But now, after her all but fifty years' self-discipline, the glad rush into heaven was well permissible. . . .

The liqueur, then. Marie-Blandine had placed a jar below the tap which distilled, in slow drops, the sticky liquid. The bell rings: Marie-Blandine goes off, to make examen; the jar would take long to fill; she would come back. Come back she didn't till late that evening, having forgotten tap, liqueur, and jar. . . . A deluged cellar, an all but empty vat; hundreds of francs' worth lost. Blandine at the feet of Sophie, sobbing; Sophie calm, forgiving, even smiling. Night comes; Marie-Blandine tosses wakeful. In the silent hours, a sound of slow, slow drops, as of a heavy liquid falling into an empty vat, that echoes less and less as it seems to fill. Marie-Blandine rises and hears Mass: she flies to the cellar. Cellar dry; and vat full to the brim.

Another tale. In November, 1861, Sister Thérèse assembles her Community: the building was complete, the children properly housed; the Community could at last live true to their ideal. Carmel supplied the ideal, or at least the spirit, as you cannot but feel when you hear her cry aloud that they must not be half-and-half religious; that if they made a Community where fervour reigned not, God had best destroy them—yes, burn the whole place up. . . . Night comes. Before twelve, the house, somehow, is on fire.

The staircase, a veritable chimney, is ablaze. On the second floor sleep the children, in charge of Sister Alexandrine. Impossible to descend; they climb to the attics. Vain hope: on the floor, already scorching hot, they kneel and recite their act of contrition, their act of hope. . . . A child cries: "The roof!" But the skylight is high; no stool or chair to reach it. The nun lifts up each child to the sloping sill; each swings itself out on to the tiles, huddles down on to the cornice; and the nun remains to burn. Intolerable thought! The children make a living chain, and stooping head downwards through the window, seize her by the wrists, and haul. Somehow she, too, reaches the ledge, crawls out on to the cornice; the wind sweeps the flames towards them. A child screams in a panic that she cannot, *will* not burn, and plunges into emptiness. . . . She should have been broken to bits; but no. She sits up, brushes her hair off her eyes, and says oddly: "A hand held me up as I fell and put me softly on the grass *which felt cold*." . . . On the cornice, the others crouch saying Hail Mary's. Ladder after ladder comes; all are too short. At last one long enough arrives, and a man climbs. As he touches the roof, an older girl, driven frantic by fear and her mother's screams, flings herself on to him. He staggers; the ladder breaks, they fall. But they fall on their feet, scarcely so much as shaken. Yet another ladder, but it, too, maddeningly a few feet short. And an incredible incident. An ex-convict, eager to

"make good" in his new liberty, and gigantically strong, lies flat on the earth, plants the ladder on his chest, expands his muscles, and holds it there. Something is gained; even so, not enough. Up the ladder, leaning on the now tottering wall, and based on its human pedestal, a strong man climbs. Standing on the topmost rung, balancing himself Heaven knows how, he reaches his hands up. The nun, at full arm's length, lets down each child; he takes her, brings her safe to earth, remounts for another, and does this a score of times. Last of all, Sister Alexandrine descends. As she touches earth, the house collapses, and a volcano of spark, flame, and smoke ascends: but as for God's little ones, on them "not so much as the smell of fire had passed."

As early as 1855, when Sister Thérèse took her vow of perpetual virginity, "God Himself formulated," she writes, "in my heart the vow of never deliberately accepting any joy for myself, but of offering it to Him; never to express my sufferings except to Him, and when it should be my duty to have recourse to others for advice, to do it uniquely to please God, referring to Him the relief I should gain, not savouring it on my own account—deliberately, that is."

This austere vow helped her in the ever-growing distress of her soul. Sometimes the interior conflict became so violent that she seemed to be helpless in its uproar. Not only no "felt" happiness or even ease, but "agonising pain about all that concerned God and His holy service. My

soul was filled with darknesses, violent temptation against God and faith, anger, hate against God, despair. And this almost without respite."

She had, now and again, a "lightning flash" of encouragement and of understanding; in these she found the needed help for shadowing forth, in her Community of Bon Secours, the Marie Auxiliatrice to be; she linked her house ever closer to Mary; she instituted a weekly all-night watch before the Blessed Sacrament. But it was not till 1864 that, after an eight days' retreat, a visit to the Superioress of the Charité at Toulouse, consultations with the Jesuit Fathers there, and the Archbishop, that she became clear she must leave the *béguinage*. That meant abandoning first and foremost the forceful management of Canon de Soubiran. She explained the position to him with a splendid loyalty: and he, on his side, generous and truly noble in the fibre of his soul, never dreamed of resisting God's will—this time undoubtful—and accepted to see the crash of all his hopes.

In May she left for Toulouse, took up her home with the Réparatrices there, made a thirty days' retreat under Fr. Ginhaç, S.J., and crowned it with two vows, one to do (with God's grace) whatever she saw to be the more perfect; the other, to hold herself *incapable* of possessing any private property, even the most trivial, and this, despite her clear prevision that God might so test her as to refuse altogether, some day, her service as a nun, and leave her a beggar by the wayside. When those

days came her vow proved, after all, her supreme support and consolation.

But her will held good: in June, 1864, she summoned those of her Community who resolved to follow her, to the house she had taken at Toulouse.

During this time she had been honestly trying to fulfil her resolve to think herself *always wrong*, excepting in the solitary fact that she knew she had received from God a call she was not yet answering, with "the formal, strict obligation of preserving this little grain that God had placed in my hands, for Himself. I could see no further than that, but it was enough to make me treat it with deep respect. I *have* to say that." Each time she almost yielded, and even made one step towards yielding, God "gathered her to Himself"; "He Himself warmed me on His Heart; I renewed my life in Him." Even externally He had cherished and developed what, looking back to, she feels to be already "Marie Auxiliatrice," because to that, though she did not know it, God was already calling her and her companions, and for it was forming them. "He provided for all our needs with the tenderness of the best of mothers." And this metaphor of God's mother-love recurs constantly as she writes. Yet the material conditions of life in the *béguinage* had been hard enough. But to her material hardships never meant anything.

(iii)

At Toulouse you would have said she had only to place herself peacefully in God's presence, for the hidden knowledge of her soul to breathe itself outwards, permeate her mind, and begin, thus, to realise itself in the concrete life of herself and her associates. In her room was a sort of cupboard let into the wall, so that a thin partition only separated her from the adjoining chapel. Here she made a tiny aperture, through which the altar could be seen; and kneeling here, save for the very brief space she spent asleep on the floor, she watched through the night, and prayed.*

"I began," she wrote, "to receive from God the grace of a most recollected prayer. I was rather afraid of this to begin with, because my mind began to analyse it too minutely. My active temperament, and the lack of wise direction, made me very unfaithful to it. From this I suffered deep spiritual loss. And Our Lord had to strike many a blow to bring me back to the spirit of simplicity and union which, all the way through, was the character God gave to my interior life."

* Yet it is true she was impressionable. Elsewhere she insists she did not really want even the kind of life she now initiated. She approached Fr. Gin hac desirous to break with *all* active work, and finish her life in solitude. She "esteems and loves the apostolic life better than all else" and has true and vivid "lights" concerning it. "Yet the moment I had to act or to make others act all grew confused within me; I saw nothing clearly any more. I *slopped about* in everything."

Along with her prayer went a profound study of the rules given by St. Ignatius to the Society he founded. With the help of two Sisters she wrote a sort of commentary on them, adapting them to the idea of her own Society. But like any creative genius, she infused even such material as she took over with a personal spirit: no more does Vergil reproduce, merely, Homer, than does Marie Auxiliatrice just feminise the Jesuits! St. Teresa worked with her, no less than St. Ignatius; and you may say, that along with the harmonising of interior and exterior life, adaptability is the note most clearly struck by Founder and by Foundress.

The Abbé Théloz well insists on the double significance of the title *Marie Auxiliatrice*. Who, in the Church's history, so *hidden* as Our Lady? Bethlehem, Calvary, and Pentecost consummate her life. But in all that same history, nowhere so true a "helper" of her Son, and of her sons. Sometimes, at the sight of the frightful modern conflicts, with their complicated programmes and academic devices meant to heal, one is apt to feel that programmes and theories, even, might well be flung to the winds, if only we would be content to *serve*. Service is enough, even the very humblest—I mean, the most simple, un-far-reaching, uncalculated; the merest taking of an opportunity to do whatever tiny thing is possible for a fellow-human who is twice over one's brother—for his own sake and for Christ's. A nod, a smile; a match, even. After all, why

discuss what is so certain ! The "cup of cold water" cannot be forgotten since Our Lord did not disdain to mention it. . . . I do not mean people are wrong to theorise and plan: but even in our too complicated civilisation, where theories and plans are apt to introduce just one new complication or to create new groups antagonistic to what they disagree with, there is room (we can reflect for our refreshment) for a simple all-day helpfulness, an affectionate will to serve, which can be very healing, and, for all its simplicity, can involve a very searching "mortification" which may *exact* an absolute humility, and implies true worship of the all-present God, through His Son Incarnate, Jesus Christ.

This, with supreme clearness, Marie-Thérèse beheld, and, with supreme conviction, accepted. Hence, first and foremost, prayer; else the vision would grow dim, and its appropriation weak. At the very heart of her Institute, she placed the Adoration of the Most Holy Sacrament exposed, beginning at six in the evening and lasting till eight o'clock next day, or at least for as many hours as there were Sisters. She insists that this is to be characteristic of the spiritual and *apostolic* life of the Society. It can *never* be wholly omitted. The Sisters have a "special mission" primarily for that. The day's work prepares for that, and it is that which pours forward to help the next day's toil. It is the necessary help for the kind of life she means her Sisters to lead; and the hour's Adoration must always begin with

the full offering of oneself, followed by an earnest prayer for that "look" of Christ which "transforms" a soul. Else, how should her nuns convert? how expiate?

How else, too, should they maintain their tremendous ideal in a life made up of tiny things? For see how relentlessly she forbids them to dream of the sensational and flamboyant! Even their own sufferings she foresees not as dramatic illnesses that coerce the emotions of an onlooker, or need heroic remedies, but as the prolonged discomforts which wear one down and tire one out, yet give one no right to stop altogether. . . .

"What must be essential in us," she goes on, "is the desire of an especially humble and hidden perfection; we want especially to imitate, as best we can, the *hidden* life of Our Lord, so perfect and yet so common and ordinary in the eyes of all. . . . The works which our Society shall adopt are always to be taken by preference from among those which others cannot do: we consider ourselves, sincerely, as the last among Christ's handmaids, and we must feel it quite natural to have for our share what is left over by others who glorify Him by more exalted or more public enterprises. This spirit of holy *littleness* must be our special spirit, and must always prevent our disdaining, as too common or too vulgar, any of the works which it may please God to confide to us. . . . Though God forbid that by a false humility we should ever neglect the great principle of St. Ignatius: To God's *greater* glory. . . . Thus we are especially free to *help* the other secular or religious Congregations, lending ourselves

gladly to any service they may ask of us, and finding it quite natural to be set aside once we are no more useful."

Is not this that Apostolate of Odds and Ends, resignation to which we at times feel so difficult? We chafe at the incoherence of life; the interruptions; the little chips and splinters of real work; and the great mass of neutral pulp. The sheer business of getting from one place to another! The cumbersomeness of correspondence! The hour's talk for one sentence's sake! The absurd necessity of going slow; of preparing paths; the patchwork product; the ravelled ends; the impossibility of complacently admiring an ideal realised. Well, that is good for us, who are but fractions—"vulgar fractions," a boy once said to me—of what we *shall* be, please God; but fractions, at long last, in a far greater whole: and our work is fractional, viewed in itself; paltry, and even unintelligible. Only one force can animate and unify ourselves, our work, and our world—the continuous love of God through Jesus Christ, who Himself was a man, and died.

I wanted to make quite clear the spirit in which Marie Auxiliatrice was founded. It must be held as certain that all her life Sophie de Soubiran was being called by God to a perfectly definite thing, even when she knew with no true certainty what it was. Clear, too, is it that this thing was so important that Satan used, to attack it, not only, as we have seen and shall see, exterior forces that were, in the case of M. de Soubiran's in-

tentions and personality, thoroughly good—and this will prove helpful to remember—but the interior mood which these exterior pressures fostered in Sophie herself—that is, the exaggerated disposition to think herself always wrong. But at her innermost, she was right; and when her real heart could express itself, as it did in these early days, the results, too, were right.

At Toulouse, true to her ideal, she turned her mind towards helping those whom no one helped. At Castelnaudary it had been children; here it was girls who had been “left out”—neither the very poor, nor the well-served rich; but working-girls and shop-girls. There was nothing for them; they left their homes for the shop, the factory, or the workroom, and we dare not blame them if they cheated the drab loneliness of life with such illusions as they could snatch at. They came in crowds to Marie Auxiliatrice; for *seventy-five centimes a day* (the worst London doss-house used to be twopence a night, with cocoa) the incomparable housekeeping of these French ladies gave them bed, hot breakfast, dinner, and supper—a supper which had to be prolonged, using extra fuel, since their hours for return but seldom coincided. Dormitories, recreation-room, refectory—all that had to be built. Evening classes, too, were held, and to these, other girls, who slept out, came in crowds, and were escorted home by the very fearless nuns. A very little experience teaches you how exhausting work of this sort can be: the nuns had to teach, to cook and serve, to

entertain, to be gay and sensible, to be spiritual. And to rise in the night for one hour's adoration. And to be up once more before the girls left, early, for their work. You are simply driven to assert that the hour's prayer at night, though it broke sleep, supplied *power*. It should have tired; but it *strengthened*.

In 1867 a lady, strongly recommended by a priest of the Society of Jesus, came to Toulouse as a postulant. She was obviously well educated, brilliant even, widely read, and able to use her reading; she talked delightfully and, what is more, convincingly; she revealed a quick, constructive imagination, and force of will. After a very little time, no one doubted that here was a woman in every way fitted to be a most admirable religious, and that there was no limit to the good she might do in the new Congregation. Marie-Thérèse went farther. She, whose one personal "ambition" was to be a "crossing-sweeper," to be forgotten, to disappear, who totally disbelieved in her own qualities for government or even for obeying, and, above all, lacking any continuous direction—for Fr. Ginhac was a busy man, and could not see much of her—she therefore was captivated entirely by the charm, the practical idealism, the versatile successes of her new recruit, and in a year's time—for within a year the postulant had been accepted, clothed, and professed—had practically abdicated. She remained Superior in name; Mère Marie-Françoise became so in fact. Marie-Françoise began at the beginning. They must go straight to

Rome and obtain a brief "praising" the plan of Marie Auxiliatrice. To Rome they go, and return in triumph with the brief. Now Marie-Thérèse shall learn the true Jesuit spirit! *Magnas Ignatius urbes*. Mère Marie-Françoise has a superb *coup d'œil*, and sees spread before her, as in a map, the great industrial centres of France. There Marie Auxiliatrice shall settle, and regenerate the land. They go to Amiens and buy a sugar-factory. Hastily transformed, in two months it can house a small army of factory-girls. Next, Lyons. A house is hired; before doors and windows are in place, before bedding has come, when for chief furniture the nuns found bales upon bales of *notepaper*, they took up their dwelling there; thither, too, came the crowds; a charming country-house was hired, that on Sundays and holidays they might breathe fresh air and contemplate a park. . . . Only the Franco-Prussian war interfered with the nuns' advance on Paris. . . .

Meanwhile, old influences were waning. Even before she left for Rome, Marie-Thérèse had lost her mother. This aged lady had come to live at Marie Auxiliatrice in Toulouse, the humblest of paying guests, and her life went by in prayer and charity. In 1868 she died, and in her agony *had refused to have her daughter sent for*. "She is working for God," she had whispered. "Let her be. We shall have all eternity for seeing one another." Such, then, was the faith of this Catholic French lady, not unworthy of her

husband's. Canon de Soubiran, too, was leaving his niece at the moment when his anxiety for her was beginning to overwhelm him. He watched, from Castelnau-dary, the deviation of the Congregation, which, despite of all, he loved, from the only path he could believe was right. Despite his seeming harshness, he had lived in real humility and setting aside of self, and the triumphant career of Marie Auxiliatrice was frightening him. His deathbed, like his life, was stern, and from time to time resentful; but just as he died, he seemed transfigured; all the sweetness of his hidden soul shone in his face; he smiled radiantly, happily, and so died.

France was in chaos. Mère Marie-Thérèse and her assistant had gone to London to make sure of a refuge, should one be needed, for their religious. Soon, they summoned the Community of Lyons, who, dressed in lay clothes of the sort which enable you to know instantly that these are nuns "disguised," proceeded to Honfleur. Tiny incidents diversify the tale. Thus, the innkeeper at Honfleur perceives whom he has to deal with, and surrounds his guests with courtesies. A nun has a brother, ingloriously glorious as sub-prefect of that most modest port. *He* deems himself disgraced by his sister's quaint attire. . . . They try to take their tickets; the Superior offers a money-order. No use; gold is required, and gold they have not. Some sailors see them, ask for the note, say they can change it. The note passes from hand to hand, and disappears. After

a panic-stricken pause, the nuns perceive that the hands are busy once again, collecting this time. The banknote's worth in coin is handed to the now smiling Sister, minus five francs, retained as rate of exchange. . . .

They went to St. George's, Southwark, and were given a house. But its owner, so the story goes, offended by the extreme poverty of his tenants—they used straw to lie on and for window-curtains—gave them notice to be off. They migrate to Kensington, where the Toulouse and Amiens Communities rejoin them, and fifty persons are lodged in a house equipped for eight. They have to work to gain money to live, to pay their rents in France, and to buy—some day—return tickets. A detail. Their delicate embroidery, though it at once found a good market, exacted constant washings of the hands. Now the house water-supply sufficed for eight or ten tenants only; so, to wash adequately, the Sisters had to curtail their drinking-ration. As for eating, they sat on the stairs, on the floor, to do that; at night, they slept on mattresses which at daybreak they rolled up and carried in single file to the attic. And there were days when a mattress came undone; its bearer staggered; it fell; and in its fall carried the rest of the mattresses, and the Community, to the bottom of the stairs. No bones were broken; no one wept. Wept? They couldn't even allow themselves to laugh—it was still “greater silence”!

It was Fr. Anderdon who stood their good

friend during these laborious but quite happy months, especially at the worst moment, when the sudden bankruptcy of their landlord gave them but one day and a couple of nights to find a new house, lest their effects be seized by creditors. It was the January of 1871, when "the cold was sharp even ["even!"] in England": at five in the morning the nuns set off, bending beneath vast packages, for Kentish Town, where Fr. Anderdon, who followed with the Blessed Sacrament, had found them a dilapidated house in a garden. And lo, a sinister, scarce believable, discovery. Behind the parlour-door, a coffin; in the coffin a dead baby, left there who knows by whom, and not removed till the day was closing in.

One last migration. They went to Kennington, and there, protected by the Bishop, their proper work was once more possible; they hospitalise shop-girls, governesses; they instruct converts, and train a group of young women to piety.

However, it became possible to return to France. It became correspondingly possible for the assistant to "enlarge our sphere of action," "adopt a national and constructive policy," "establish ourselves on a true business basis," and to centralise at Paris. The idea was to open enormous establishments for working-girls in all great industrial centres, and alongside of these, orphanages: the orphans would learn a trade, earn more than their keep, provide themselves thus with a satisfactory capital against the day when they should come of age and go forth into the

world, and with the residue, pay for the vast building enterprises all this would entail. On paper, the scheme looked perfect. Marie-Thérèse believed her assistant blindly: figures anyhow meant next to nothing to her; above all, she foresaw the salvation of multitudes of souls. She agreed to everything, and put her name to all manner of contracts. Lyons was reopened; Amiens enlarged to many times its original dimensions; foundations were laid for an enormous noviciate at Bourges; a house was created at Angers, and new workshops at Toulouse. Work poured in; also orphans; vocations multiplied.

But, alas! the orphans did the work badly: the Sisters had to sit up half the night improving it, till it should suit its purchasers: the night's hour of adoration suffered; likewise health. Moreover, novices had to be drafted off, half trained, to supplement the professed Sisters, far too few to cope with the gigantic task. The awakening came in 1873 and 1874, when Marie Auxiliatrice found itself in debt for over a million and a half, with no means of paying off or even diminishing or even arresting the growth of this appalling sum. For a long time Mère Marie-Thérèse had fought her instincts with her arguments: she *felt sure* that the whole line of action was wrong; but she could not confute the assistant's reasoning, nor could anyone else. Still, after a while, she had "opposed the over-rapid growth of the Society," she writes, "with all my strength," and had, in fact, driven Mère

Marie-Françoise desperate by her "obstinate intractability." But even Marie-Thérèse was appalled by the revelation of the facts, and as for the assistant, "when first she saw how bad the state of things had become, she was horror-struck, and spontaneously declared: "I am responsible for it all. Without me, you would have done nothing."

None the less, she allowed the Superior-General to shoulder the entire responsibility of the schemes, their administration, and the imminent crash.

Now to what extent Mère Marie-Françoise had done, or was to do, anything *morally blameworthy*, I will not ask. I have not even inquired for the opinion of the Sisters of Marie Auxiliatrice to-day, of whom many must have known her. I will say, a little lower down, what I feel may very well be true; but first, I will copy out what Mère Marie-Thérèse wrote, by order of obedience, in 1881, and which may be regarded as a truthful retrospect; then I will make a comment; and finally, I will write out the incomparable pages in which Marie-Thérèse speaks to herself and to God.

"In vain (I had) always sought to resist, with all my strength, the over-rapid growth of the Society. M. M.-F. had succeeded in outstripping me. In consequence of this imprudent conduct, at the end of 1873 a terrible storm arose against the material side of the Society.

"It was not long before M. M.-F. would recognise the facts. The first time she saw how serious they were, she was horror-struck, and said spontane-

ously to me: 'I am responsible for it all; without me you would have done nothing.' That was the truth: her persuasive arguments had torn me from all my personal judgments, and had made me desert the extreme slowness which had characterised the first years of Marie Auxiliatrice.

"This much must be acknowledged: M. M.-F. begins by fascinating you by her brilliant statement of a scheme, the clearness and cogency of her arguments, the accuracy of her estimates, the delicacy, tact, and skill of her action. Finally, she settles her resolutions by the living ardent faith which animates her. Yet, by an inconceivable mental kink (*travers*), when all is going well, she turns suddenly to the right-about; she breaks and upsets all that she had decided on or done, and off she runs to something else. But she soon becomes aware of what had been upset, and quite failing to realise that it is *she* who has upset it, she attacks those who resist her and puts the blame for everything on them. At such moments she deludes herself, and therefore states what is false with all the force and persuasive vehemence with which her sincere belief inspires her. In this way—oh! she becomes quite terrible, and yet stays blameless; that is my personal conviction. She is the prime victim of this wretched *kink*. If, in 1874, I had seen her in this light, never would I have dreamt of confiding the Society to her, it goes without saying. Alas, many another was deceived, besides myself!

"On to me, therefore, she drew down the whole storm; she accused me in public of pride and ambition; of appalling irregularity which could not but draw down God's curse (she said) on the Society; and of being unable to govern or administer the Society in any way."

Very briefly, I would say that what we seem to suffer from nowadays, in England at any rate, is, first and foremost, lack of imagination. We can't get comprehensive views; nor see the country, nor Europe, nor the Church, as a whole: we can't even see ourselves as a Community. In consequence, we don't realise the existence of community duties—duties creating an obligation upon *us* as a Community to the Community; in consequence again we have but little common inspiration, or common massive action. (All these good things exist, of course, up to a point: but not nearly up to the right point.) The result is, mediocrity all round. A narrow vision; pale desires; fragmentary, local, intermittent, and quick-exhausted effort. Now picture a woman the exact opposite of all this: a woman of brilliant imagination, unable to restrict herself to the local and the momentary; thinking in nations and in periods, thinking *Catholic-wise*. A woman of *practical* imagination, transforming the dream at once into a scheme; imposing the ideal with energy; determined to "build Jerusalem" in her dear country, and draw down, by force if need be, the shining city from the clouds. And herself inspired, throughout, with a true faith, so that for her, too, "Dieu le veut" becomes a watchword. How should He not will the regeneration of His tortured world?

Then picture her suddenly discovering that an incomparable instrument is ready to her hand—a religious Congregation full of enthusiasm, untrammelled by traditions, in fact, having *for*

tradition, adaptability—readiness for anything, to be applied where needed; to be applied, in short, outside the conventional lines where existing organisations were working and were failing. And its supreme Superior *approves*; obedience sanctions her suggestions; the tiny scratchings at surfaces, the unorganised collections of groups of girls here and groups of girls there is *recognised* as insufficient; the forward move, the continued onslaught on great industrial centres, the power-houses of modern life, is accepted and blessed; Rome itself not only “praises,” but is *quick* to praise. . . .

Then, suddenly, she finds that the Superior becomes a drag; knows nothing about money; simply cannot hatch a general idea; resists everything; is wedded to fantastic notions like getting up at night to pray, when every ounce of strength is needed for the day’s work: doesn’t see that work *is* prayer; doesn’t see that a novice *could* have no better “formation” than the work itself she is destined to do. That this Superior none the less won’t trust herself an inch; can’t take a decision; feels sure, if she does decide, that she has settled wrong; in a word, believes herself always wrong, and *yet* hampers the very persons whom she professed, at least, to believe were right. How can anything whatsoever be done so long as such a Superior retains her superiority—indeed, so long as her very influence survives, conflicting with the influence that makes for expansion, for doing the work that simply *must* be done, that

God *wants* to be done? And how should that *conflict* of influences coexist in the one Society? And how should they *not* coexist, so long as the two women who exert them are both there? Resignation of office? That would not be enough. One or the other must assuredly resign; more than that, sooner or later, one or the other most inevitably go; and if inevitably, the sooner the better.

That is how, may we not think, the mind of Marie-Françoise worked, and it is hard to see exactly at what point the certainly wrong element entered. Or was there anything that she could have seen to be “certainly wrong”? To be certain that Marie-Thérèse was right, had you not got to *be* Marie-Thérèse? For *her* certainty—her tiny nucleus of certainty, the “grain” she clung to—came, not from arguments or outward experience, but from an inmost history of inexpressible communication with her God.

In her incomparable humility Marie-Thérèse wrote in her private notes:

“Hitherto [*i.e.*, until her establishment at Toulouse] God alone, so to say, had acted—acted despite my feebleness, my wretchedness, and my cowardice. His almighty power alone had conquered every obstacle and myself; and Marie-Auxiliatrice, that little *nothing*, under His divine hand, despite all created things, had taken life and growth in His holy love. . . . But soon I got out of God’s hands and pure and simple faith. Till my long retreat I had remained really ‘poor’

of all help. . . . But afterwards, thinking I was doing right, I madly leaned on created things—things good and holy, yet *created*. And what a difference between the solidity and peace of the work before and the work after !”

She repeats this in almost the same words, and then continues:

“No doubt God very often sets creatures to be His channels and instruments; but I have forgotten too easily that they cannot be thought of as source and inspiration, and, in fact, never are so. God had granted me to embrace generously the heavy new burden His divine will laid upon me. Without the clear evidence of His holy will, I never could have bent my extreme repugnance towards doing so. Of that I am quite sure. But I was terribly wrong in approaching what God wanted of me with a thoroughly human fear. In face of so grave a responsibility, and just looking at *myself*, my spirit of faith weakened. I lacked faith in the help of God, especially faith in the action of God in me. Because of my innumerable shortcomings, I madly feared that this almighty action was paralysed, and, as it were, impossible in me. I did not adore, in all humility and confidence, the mystery of the Power of God in His humble, docile creature. No; I did not have faith in God.

“‘I can do nothing’ and ‘I can do everything,’ each equally true, have remained a mystery for me, a stumbling-block to my reason. And in truth, finding only wretchedness in myself, by a false humility I believed in the power of created things that I saw to be—and I was right—better than I was, so as to do through them, for God, what

I dared not look full in the face, I alone with God alone. O Omnipotence of God, how have I misunderstood you ! I acknowledge it at last ; nothing hinders you ; despite all, you achieve your adorable ends. . . . O Providence of my God : you seem to throw everything into confusion, to spoil, to remove, to destroy everything ; and then, when it pleases you, you restore everything to the soul that thought it had lost everything and for ever, but none the less was hoping in your sovereign infinite goodness, your almighty goodness."

She continues by lamenting the lack of a firm direction which should energetically have prevented her from too much introspection.

"I failed to find it. Good holy Fr. Ginhaç trusted me too much. He left me too solitary."

She had tried to explain to him how distressed she was by the all but worldly suggestions of certain religious (other than the assistant), but he had snubbed her, and she dared not try again. She persuaded herself she was wrong, she yielded and did as they bade. Fr. Pérard, she recalls, told her later on that her faults had been but material—they were not moral faults, but mistakes in external policy.

"Only towards the end I too readily identified myself, both in act and word, with human thoughts and methods."

All this while Our Lord was incessantly teaching her—

“by constant interior words, clear, precise, distinct, short, bringing to my soul light, life, and strength to act . . . and one grace in particular, which went to convince me of the love of God, infinite, beyond all understanding, wholly unmerited, that has no reason save love itself—the love that He deigns to have for the poor work of His own hands, the poor human creature.”

God's preparation was very clear indeed.

“In February, 1873, God established me in faith, making me pass outside, so to say, all that concerns the senses. A few interior words were spoken to me: ‘Your mission is finished; soon there will not even be a place left for you in the Society; but I will direct all things with no less force than sweetness.’ Here are a few interior words that transformed my soul: ‘Why pay so much attention to the tastes and feelings of the senses, when by faith the soul possesses Reality—that is, God Our Lord—by grace and the Most Holy Eucharist?’ That was one of the greatest graces I have received in all my life; it destroyed many an illusion, removed many obstacles to my interior life; it began a real process of pacification in my soul. ‘Your mission is over.’ Who can resist the force and the sweetness of the voice of God? I said Yes, and my soul remained permeated all through with force and vigour. I ought not to omit to note that Holy Communion—always, but especially since February, 1873—has been a source of life for my soul, because God gives me in it so living a faith, that without distressing myself about what I feel, I go wholly to our Lord, all of me, wholly, because I know that He is there, He, too, all of Him wholly.”

When she realised that her mission was over, it was, she wrote, "as though something within her detached itself, separated itself, and fell." She resolved on resigning her superiorship.

"In matters so grave and so dear, it is easy, I feel, to put oneself in the wrong; to think and believe that others will do better than we; to set before oneself the complete sacrifice of one's honour and of one's whole self, in order to safeguard sacred interests.

"To me *first*, therefore, it occurred to offer my resignation and suggest M. M.-F. I knew she was very clever, and I thought she was capable of maintaining what she alone had created; besides, I had great faith in her virtue. Then she asserted so loud and so emphatically that by my fault alone the Society was ready to collapse. On the other hand, very serious reasons, which concern M. M.-F. personally, made me think it was impossible that she should be made Superior-General."

She was, therefore, torn two ways, and a heart-breaking consideration added itself to that of the unfitness of the assistant to become General.

"God gave me a glimpse, but a most distinct one, that the result of my resignation, (though) freely offered and given, would be my exit and my dismissal from the Society, and my heart rose in revolt at the idea of my vocation broken, at the thought of leaving the Society in its hour of peril, of seeming to shirk the danger, of the indignation which would, without doubt, and with some show of reason, be felt against me."

She determined to see Fr. Ginhac, "who more than any other had taken a chief part in founding the Society." She arrived at Castres February 10, 1874, exhausted, ill, and in a real death-agony; all one part of her life was dying. . . . She saw the priest, told him what she could, perhaps too humbly. He telegraphed for the assistant. She came.

"The influence of her words was such that all the blame was put on me, by the very man who, ten years previously, had settled everything for the Society, and for me in the Society."

He advised her to resign.

Fr. Ginhac was holy, and for the most part prudent: but all agree that, humanly speaking, he here made the greatest mistake in judgment that a man well could make. Nor did he stop there. Mère Marie-Françoise—Marie-Thérèse insists that she sincerely believes the assistant took up her new office as from God's hand and under obedience, and not through ambition or selfishness, and that she never once meant to hurt her—the moment the Archbishop accepted the resignation, suggested that it was useful and indeed necessary that Marie-Thérèse should not return to Bourges for a fortnight, nor even enter any of the houses of the Society, so that the new Superior-General *might have time to settle down*. . . .

"By this new measure, I saw that I was altogether lost: but at Fr. Ginhac's wish, I agreed to everything. . . . To save the Society, the

sacrifice of myself seemed nothing. . . . But I could see that as long as I were present, M. M.-F. would do nothing; and I could also see that she would quickly enough be afraid of my influence, and that soon she would insist on my leaving the Society even if I refused it, and that she would easily find a way of making me do so. . . . God knows how dear the Society was to me, and what, in consequence, I suffered when I saw my complete rupture with it. You must have gone that road, to understand it, I give you my word."

Writing to her director, Fr. Pérard, of whom I speak below, in 1874 (March 2), and therefore in the very hours of her worst misery, and too close to events, perhaps, to have an accurate perspective, she says that her conviction has ever been that she was to save souls by prayer alone, and not by active work: even after her settling at Toulouse, she had never conceived of herself as Foundress, but only as an instrument which had to conform itself to what God willed and showed through others. "I had to go on and on"—*Il fallait marcher et marcher toujours*; her violent self-sacrifice for others had had to be regarded as God's substitute for the lonely immolation she had longed for; but even in this she had come to feel a sort of satisfaction; now even that must be rooted out; she must have suffering in its most austere, most *positive* way. (It is remarkable how much she used this word *positive*. Evidently she had been much exhorted to acquire that characteristic.) When she heard God's word, "Your mission in the Society is over," something

“detached itself, became separate, and fell.” She gave up the whole idea of the Society, and seemed to breathe more freely.

“Never has the Society been a *nest* for me; nor, in it, have I been in my element. Always my soul has been in a state of conflict there.”

Yet a superb unselfishness reveals itself. Her sources of anguish seemed to her to have been five: First—

“to live away from our Mother, from whom my soul has received so much, and whom it seems to need so much, away from her who alone has widened my path for me; second, to cast her—she is so tired already—into an abyss, to put her under the weight of so heavy a burden; third, to keep absolute silence towards her about all these things . . . to eat them all up quite alone—to realise how harsh my reserve would seem to her—she might altogether mistake its motive—it might create misunderstandings between me and her that never could be rectified; fourth, to leave my sister, whose soul was causing me such grave anxieties;* and fifth, to desert the Society at this distressing crisis, and thus to seem to be flying from work and pain. . . . The second and fifth reasons very nearly stopped me. . . . Finally, and I say it to my shame, the thought of having to go I know not whither, broken in body and soul as I am, with nothing in the world, thanks be to God, by my special vow of poverty. . . . Well, all these things made my nature to

* Her sister, too, had entered Marie Auxiliatrice. God gave her the grace of following her vocation nobly and to the end.

leap with revolt and anguish. My poor heart was crushed. Yet never for a moment did I really hesitate, or have a serious temptation to wish to change or even touch anything that was offered me. . . . I profoundly adored, I loved the Will that was crushing me . . . and during this period of pain I found prayer good. I was so hungry, so cold, so frightened! I cried for mercy and pity. And my soul felt itself consoled, strengthened, and in a very deep, though very bitter, peace.

"I would not have wished to alter my position; willingly, I think, I would have increased the suffering that was crushing me; it became my good substantial food."

When writing in 1880, and again in 1881, she saw more clearly into herself and into the character of Mère Marie-Françoise, and could write in the sense of the words I have already quoted (p. 144), and also had begun to see more clearly how great had been the sacrifice of giving up Marie Auxiliatrice. At the moment she had felt almost like some wounded animal that asks merely to get away, hide itself, and die: in reality, the struggle to give up—for God had really *called her to found Marie Auxiliatrice*, whether or no He really meant her to stay as its head—was enormous.

"From all sides," she writes, "I heard as it were, the cry, 'Down with Marie Auxiliatrice': it tore my heart, my very soul. My keenest anguish was the sight of so many souls who, in a manner, belonged to me, and whose vows, I was told, would be broken owing to me alone. Oh! the *weight of souls* is a pain like no other pain;

who can understand it, save one who shall have borne it? In life, compared to that, nothing is anything."

She emphasises the pain of leaving her sister, to whom *loyalty forbade her to explain anything*: she wanted to attract all the blame to herself, and knew that her sister, loyal in her turn, would never keep silence. In any case, she foresaw that her sister, too, would be sooner or later dismissed. Then:

"A third thorn was my dear, dear vocation, that I was about to lose for ever; my vows on the point of being dissolved, without any hope of finding them again, ever. Here, once more, I dare assert it, you must *experience* if you would understand."

God alone remained, and the gifts He was giving were so precious that—

"they could never be bought too dear—no, never too dear. God, forgetting my past faults, carried me in His bosom like the tenderest of mothers. He granted me to be able to pray almost without interruption; to pray with simplicity without being afraid of Him . . . to find all in prayer. In old days I used to wait to be 'good' to put myself in God's presence. Ah, the illusion in that! What harm that did one! That error was, so to say, riveted to my soul . . . but, *then*, I understood the mystery of God communicating to His creature, by prayer and in prayer, His ineffable treasures of grace streaming through her in prayer. . . . To have understood that is a grace bought never too dearly.

“God therefore carried me thus in His arms and gave me a confidence that I had never tasted yet. . . . I superabounded in the joy of having no more but God.”

Her heart found freedom, expansion, and peace.

But to realise that one has been happy in one's torment, is the work of long years. I doubt if she fully felt it during those dreadful days.

She was not to go back to Bourges. Whither, then? She tries one convent after another. They accept her for a day or two—they ask her questions; she cannot answer satisfactorily. *Why* has she resigned? *Why* is she not allowed back to one of her own houses . . .? She holds her peace, and the convents cannot keep her. They fear a scandal.

At last the Sisters of St. Vincent de Paul accept her as an inmate of their hospital at Clermont.

“Here began an agony of seven months.”

She felt her reason might give way; she offered it to God: “Take it if you will; I abandon it to you.” But the exhaustion of her mind was no more than that agonising incapacity to think which follows a prolonged strain no less than a sudden shock. She remained very weak, with suffering eyes, and unable to support the uncertainty of the future.

“Three avenues seem to lie open to me,” she writes: “(i.) To remain in the Society. With all my heart, but on two clear conditions—if I am not in the way, and if I am not in any manner

stopping or paralysing good work, or hindering the consolidation of the Society. . . . (ii.) To enter Carmel or elsewhere. But I don't hide from myself that it would be difficult, with my past, at my age, with no dowry . . . so it will be very difficult to find a place for myself, even as a lay Sister, which is all I can dare to aspire to, because of my voice, which could not sing office anywhere. So, if this way is blocked, there remains a third and very painful way—to go I know not whither. Well, Our Lord will never fail me, and I shall always keep a heart for loving Him without measure, and to lose myself more and more in Him. But since I am very far from the poetry of suffering, I do not at all disguise from myself how painful this third way will be for my nature. But I must add that there *is* another natural side, which cries aloud in me, which tells me I am too broken inside and out to be fit for the religious life anywhere. I would like to shun all society, all contact, to live alone and unknown by all. But, by the grace of God, I wish to pay no attention to that."

The upshot, however, was a conviction that she must live somewhere far from everyone; her temperament, her soul's well-being seemed to exact it; the good, too, of the Society "where I have ruined everything; without meaning to, but with perfect truth by my fault, since I have continually lacked faith and obedience."

An exquisite series of letters survives, addressed by her from Clermont to the new Superior-General. The other side of the correspondence is lost. Not only never a word of reproach, but the tenderest,

most childlike affection; the most intimate sympathy with Marie-Françoise's anxieties: "Oh, Mother! how my heart will follow you to Amiens! Oh—terrible Amiens! How terrible a Holy Week you will have to spend, dear Mother!" [For Amiens had to be sold.] And she is sure the General will sympathise with her when she dilates on the joy she finds in suffering—how she is full of trust and hope in the future, and how the woes of the Society are "a lesson—nothing but a lesson—for our poor little feather-pates—*nos pauvres petites étourdies*."

Fr. Gin hac could not write to her: he was too busy; her new director, Fr. Pérard, S.J., was still learning the full truth and worth of her soul; and he, too, at Holy Week and Easter was absorbed. She was very lonely, but even so hoped that he would soon send home Sister Marie-Blandine, who was with her—the expense of keeping her there was too great. Meanwhile, it is clear that the General was determined on getting rid of the responsibility of Marie-Thérèse, was "pushing her more and more on to" Père Pérard, and was extremely disconcerted to find the priest resolved, at this time, to keep the poor nun where she was till she could return to the Society.

"Don't think he is soft with me; no one can be so hard as he on mere nature, no one more firm. What he wills, he wills, and admits that and that only, and would let one hear about it (*vous planterait bien là*) if one did not do his will to the letter. . . . He pacifies me completely."

But her position was becoming intolerable. "You would have to be here to understand it." If she were not to return, she must be dispensed from her vows: her signature must be cancelled on all the Society's documents. To stay where she was meant the gravest inconvenience for the Sisters, who needed her room; yet where was she to go? how could she be told, as long as she had her vows, to "do as she liked"? In a terrible little postscript in a letter to another Sister she suddenly yields and *screams*. She says she is in a mouse-trap that will not open. . . .

At last the Superior told her that return was impossible. Père Pérard would not hear of *suspended* vows; she must be dispensed from them, and her name removed from every single document. That is at last decided, and she begs—almost quoting Him on whose agony her own strove to model itself—"I beg you, do it quickly." *Quod facis, fac cito*.

The Superior, meanwhile, sent her needlework to do, that she might pay for her keep. . . . She loves the very *stuff*, for the sake of the Mother who sends it, whom she loves loyally, to whom she owes so much. . . . But first, she has to buy spectacles: her eyes, exhausted, I think, by tears, could no longer see to sew.

For a while she hopes to enter a Visitation convent. On one point she displays a sudden, almost fierce, determination. Someone had advised her to become a *lady-boarder*.

“On that, you mustn’t rely. Nothing can force me to: it shall never be, I can give you the most complete assurance of that. If I cannot be a religious, I wish to be something else, but *not* a lady-boarder. I would keep turkeys, rather, if need were !”

The Superioress passed through Clermont, and visited the hospital. The visit was a joy for Marie-Thérèse, but ended in a sudden and at first inexplicable suggestion. Would Mère Marie-Thérèse return at once and become Superior at London ?

Marie-Thérèse was at first stunned by this abrupt *volte-face* on the part of a Superior-General who had done nothing, so far, but insist she had washed her hands of her, and had forbidden her so much as to correspond with the Sisters she had left—even with her own sister. After some days of prayer and consultation, she answered by imploring to be saved from the superiorship. She avowed that her head whirled at the thought of it. She had always been, and was now doubly, incapable of governing. Go to London she would, or to the ends of the earth; but command, no.

But what her simplicity could not see was understood clearly, in a day or two, by Fr. Pérard and the Archbishop. Mère Marie-Françoise had determined to concentrate in London all the Sisters whose influence she dreaded, put Marie-Thérèse at their head, declare that the house was alien in spirit to the main body of the Society, and then sever it, *en bloc*, from Marie Auxiliatrice.

Even here, I would fain reaffirm that Marie-Françoise may have been acting in good faith. She may well have believed that the London house was an excrescence; her proper place was France; in France, Marie-Thérèse and those who thought with her were a constant source of disruption, would infallibly provoke a schism. Very well; take heroic measures; sacrifice London. Concentrate the disaffected or useless nuns in that remote place, give them the Superior of their choice, and let them live and act as seemed good to them. The deed was even generous.

Marie-Thérèse, in her extreme humility, did not even now fully grasp what the Archbishop and her Director told her. She thought they meant that the house would be cut off because, with her for Superior, its spirit would go from bad to worse and *deserve* that excommunication. She implored to be allowed to live, for one year, under a Superior of her dear Society; then, if she were found too unmanageable, she would go. No; she is given to understand that the consultant Sisters have agreed that she may return, may go to London, and must then, with the whole house, be "detached from the trunk"; for now the Superior acknowledges her scheme. But the consultant Sisters had not been asked for their opinion. The scheme was wholly the Superior-General's.

Marie-Thérèse refused, as she was directed; but positive direction came not. The agonising months went by. The Visitation? Carmel?

She could be sure of nothing. At last the order came to lay aside her habit. Sophie de Soubiran, her vows dispensed, in secular dress, was definitely a nun no more.

Three more letters to the Superior-General survive; but the series closes here; letters of anguish and of trust, of indefectible trust; letters signed, "Your little daughter," and again and again, "Your poor daughter," "Your unhappy little daughter," "Your too unhappy child"; and begging always earnestly for a Mother's blessing. Letters to be read on one's knees, for their revelation of a human heart on which every storm of misery had broken, and had not quenched its love and its hope and faith. Most humbly we may repeat, with their writer, "it was worth while." For our sakes who read, it was a thousand times worth while.

At the moment when all seemed broken, one link re-formed itself. The lonely woman remembered Mme. de Firmy of the Charité at Toulouse, and this old friend accepted to receive her, first as a guest, in her house of Notre-Dame de la Charité at Paris. It was a home for Penitents.

There she was given the most gentle and the most tactful welcome on September 20, 1874. On the 24th she wrote from 193, rue St-Jacques to tell Mère Marie-Françoise of this fact. On October 4 she writes to wish her a happy feast, and encloses a pious print:

"I think it will be to your taste, and I like offering it to you on that account."

A last time, she writes on December 24 that the Archbishop of Bourges has granted her permission to apply to enter, in her new home, as a postulant, and so begin life again.

“Adieu, Mother, and in God’s love believe me, with a most tender affection, your poor and good-for-nothing child, Sister Marie-Thérèse. Postscript.—Would you believe it, dear Mother, I wrote to you meaning to send you my New Year wishes, and here I am finishing without saying a word about them! I think it is because my heart does not need special times for asking—for you and for all your interests in Our Lord—abundant graces every day. Besides, there cannot be, on earth, a happy *year*. No, heaven will be the true Year, because it will be spent in the full enjoyment of Our God, and endlessly. None the less, Mother, I wish you an 1875 quite full—piled high—with merit and with graces.”

So this correspondence ends.

(iv)

Marie-Thérèse had said she could never be a lady-boarder. Yet that is practically what for a while she became. One category of the four hundred inmates of this convent was composed of girls rather better educated than the rest, whose parents had voluntarily confided them to the care of the Charité. With these Marie-Thérèse now lived; she sewed, embroidered, followed the rule of the house; till, not very long afterwards, as we saw, she was accepted as a novice.

Only a few fragments of this period's notes remain.

"During the years 1874, 1875, 1876, Our Lord has treated me like a tender mother who, taking her child in her arms, takes away everything else from it, so that at last her little one may look at her alone, think only of her, love her only. O infinite mercy of my God, O free gift of mercy, I adore Thee, I love Thee, I hide myself in Thee!"

Above this she has pasted a little picture of St. John leaning on the breast of Jesus.

Save for Him, she feels herself, so far, just a stranger.

"A stranger, and in haste to have passed by. . . . For the Sisters, I pass by, I am a stranger; the only thing that concerns myself is to pass by quickly; doing all the good possible to our Sisters and to the children, seeing only that of the present, looking neither back nor forwards. With regard to myself, I pass by quickly, I am a stranger. Why distress myself about the means of transport, the waiting-rooms, or those whom I meet as I go by? I pass on, and all the while. Why be anxious about health, strength, or weakness? I just pass, and pass quickly, and I am a stranger, for I do not belong down here, but to God, who waits for me at the further side."

On to this mood of utter exhaustion continued prayer put its balm.

The curious reluctance of Mère Marie-Françoise to disengage Marie-Thérèse from all financial obligations in regard of the Society from which she had been dismissed occasioned a number of

postponements of her profession in her new home. She became almost desperate once more, in view of the possibility of having to leave yet another convent. She fell ill, but was cured on the eve of the day when she was to have received the last Sacraments. But the problem remained. Suppose she were refused profession, could she resign herself to go on living there, though really helping the work of the house, *not* as a religious? She thought that to be so near, yet so far from, the goal of her hopes, would be intolerable. However, she made a novena to the Ven. Fr. Eudes, who had founded N.-D. de la Charité in 1641, and offered through his intercession the complete and final sacrifice of her wishes to God, and submitted once and for all to His guidance. The sacrifice was accepted: all difficulties vanished, and she was professed on June 29, taking the name Mère Marie du Sacré Cœur.

Her life henceforward pursued itself in the monotony of tasks which to her were peace. An added joy was the entry of her sister, who was at last dismissed from Marie Auxiliatrice, into the same convent.

Of the history of Marie Auxiliatrice under Mère Marie-Françoise I need only say that after a brief revival, due to sales of houses, including, alas! the family home of the Soubirans and the Bon Secours Convent at Castelnaudary, it began, once more, its career that led to disaster. Anything else that seemed to the point I have picked out and included in the brief sketch of Mère

Marie-Elisabeth below. In connection with her, too, I allude to that institution of Villepinte, the enormous hospital for consumptives, the creation of which remains a true glory in the career of Marie-Françoise. There is no limit to the social value of this immense institution, none to the moral happiness it has brought to its inmates, none to the spiritual. Will it be believed that at the time of its creation there was scarcely a hospital of any sort for consumptives in all France? Even in 1893 M. d'Haussonville could show that some 11,000 deaths due to consumption occurred yearly in Paris alone; and M. Lagneau calculated in 1894 that out of every 1,000 inhabitants in Paris, 420 were infected by that disease. A vast new thing had to be created; and Mère Marie-Françoise was responsible for its creation. Let it never be forgotten to her honour.

What did "Marie du Sacré Cœur" ever know about Villepinte? Little enough, I think; and she could never know, at any rate, what was to be its history. When she took her final vows in 1880 (June 4) she could at least acknowledge that God had preserved Marie Auxiliatrice in existence: was it to bring glory to God? Her sufferings—endured for thirty years for its sake—would have been as nothing, were God glorified. "Oh, nothing, nothing, nothing—or rather, a *good* thing of which I were unworthy!" At least it had survived—vows still existed in it . . . but not much later, January 3, 1881, she has obtained, she writes,

“the melancholy assurance that this little Society, so beloved of God, formed by Him with so much care and love, which contains so many a fervent and deeply virtuous soul, is, morally, dead—that is, its end, its shape, its means, exist no more. This certainly has broken the strong living bond which bound me to the little Society—the work of God within it—the bond that not separation, nor anything else, could weaken as long as I could think it remained what God had made it.”

But she refuses to despair of Marie Auxiliatrice, disfigured, mutilated though it be. She ends on a note of trust, of hope, even of exultation.

And reviewing the past, she pathetically writes:

“He is bringing me back to fifteen years of age,—that is, to the pure and simple love which at that age was mine. Like a beloved child I am living in tranquillity in the bosom of my God, and I am happy in my good estate.”

Alone, she says, extreme physical fatigue still checks her: she cannot yet surmount it; it interferes with her *going to God*. Even created things still find her too sensitive: she realises that they *fatigue* the soul; she seeks to find God in them; and she notes the dates of 1873, 1879, and 1880, as those when she realised, by some sudden interior change, how God was the light of her life.

“When shall I really go to God because He is Life—my life—the only life—go to Him by a firm and living faith, when at last Our Lord shall

do all in me—that is to say, when my will, my thought, my activity, my prayer, shall make one thing with His will, His thought, activity, and prayer? When He shall be my principle of life, and I just an organ, a member of Him? . . . Since September 14, 1880, I think Our Lord is deigning to lead me, to make me His by His life, in a very simple way, hitherto unknown and impossible to me.”

Noverim me, noverim Te, wrote St. Augustine. With her, it is the opposite. To know Him thus better makes her know her own self better too, and see, not voluntary faults, but omissions, neglects of grace—above all, a sort of fountain of self, a pride “that wants to make itself a centre”; “this self-life, always so personal, so tenacious in everything . . . this tendency to live for self, to isolate myself.” The vision shocked but did not terrify her; she was learning that God loved her, not for what she was, but for what she, through Himself in her, yet might be. Even when she wrote her lines on estrangement, she could see that here was but a new paradox like that which told her she could do all and nothing. The very love of God, that estranged her from earthly things, had established her as a child for whom all creation might be home, for it was God’s. Whence a sudden astonishing realisation that all infinity resides in the *present moment* and can be grasped there:

“To believe these truths actively . . . is the only way of *being fire* (*être du feu*), far enough

from the senses, at times, but fire all the same. . . .
 O riches of the present moment! Infinite are you, for you contain my God. How should I not love you? Why not enclose myself entirely in you? Why not allow you to absorb and devour me, why not myself devour you altogether? Present moment, I resolve at last to pour myself out wholly into you, for you contain my God. Why will my tired mind subdivide itself, fritter itself away, exhaust itself in a thousand silly thoughts? Thence flow all my wrongnesses! Henceforward, my soul resolves to believe in all simplicity in the presence of my God. Present moment, I attach myself to you with veneration, independently of all created things, above all, in independence of myself."

She spends many pages, after this, in the "negative" process of stripping herself of all anxieties, all regrets, all fears, in order to plunge herself at each moment in the fulness of God's real presence in her. She is well with St. John of the Cross—"Say nothing, think nothing, desire nothing." But she uses that negation only as the means of ridding herself of the belief that her personality avails—*is*—*aught apart from God*. " 'Here am I before Thee,' is the supreme cry of the soul . . . whereby she acknowledges that God alone IS." Admirable proof of the divine source of this conviction that in Him alone is the source of Reality: it is when she yields to the desire "to live in something else—to fear the *future*"—that her "head swims." In God is her whole stability, even of mind, even of nerves.

She develops a graceful, almost humorous allegory of the plant which thrives as long as it stays rooted in one place, and outspreads itself to the Sun. So with the soul and God. Again, simplicity. Without that, no "fixity"; and *this* "fixity" only God can give.

She does not reject "motion"—that is, effort, good works, wise advice, and the like; there is no tendency at all in her to Quietism. But she knows, in the long run, it must be God's power and wisdom in her that shall achieve anything efficacious—*supernaturally real*. Hence, when they began to doubt of her ability to deal even with the children of the Institute, and made her portress, with the eternal, mechanical, yet often most laborious duty of opening doors, answering bells, sewing between whiles, and seldom speaking, she ceased to chafe at this final annihilation of activity. Even so, "thou hast placed my paths in wide spaces." God gives her "open spaces" for her soul. "The human soul becomes by grace the one and only point in the universe open to super-nature." Open yourself wide to it, then; don't argue; *do it*:

"No one dreams, before breathing, of reflecting, examining, making distinctions and comparisons about the nature and the qualities of the air he proposes to breathe. He makes no fuss: he *breathes*: that's the immediate business."

In all this, however, there is no mere philosophy—not even a supernatural philosophy—of God, His presence and power in the soul.

Throughout she reaches God in and through Our Lord. But even with Him she will not allow self to occupy her:

“This *I, I*, always *I*, is an *extra*. . . . I must not even let myself waste time in putting *myself* into the will, the suffering of Our Lord. . . . Enough that He, by His divine spirit, suffers, prays, loves, adores in me and for me. . . . Just see, that with Our Lord, *à nous deux*—we two, *we* will, suffer, pray, adore, think, judge, talk, act, keep silence. ‘*Qui adhæret Domino, unus spiritus est.*’ . . . My transformation into God. . . . The deification of my life.”

I had meant to quote much more from these spiritual notebooks, which I have found such that no meditation could exhaust their treasures. But it is true that, in one sense, Marie-Thérèse repeats herself; they contain not many motifs; they tend ever towards “simplicity.” Yet real growth is revealed in them; towards the more positive, the leap of the soul into God, and its “more abundant life” there realised. Fears fade, even the fears of sin; even the conviction that “she is always wrong.” She returns to the simplicity of childhood, and she finds, she naïvely owns, that now, as then, it is often better to say, “This would please God,” and so act, than, “This is the rule.” But she has more knowledge, now—experimental knowledge—and naïvely, again, she rejoices to find that what she has experienced is verified in, sanctioned by, “the learned books.” Indeed it is! The doctrines she ends by loving best—

her incorporation with Christ, the inhabitation of the Holy Ghost—are stated by her at times in words which recall the great Greek Fathers of the Church, and St. Paul (whom she loves to quote), and the Beloved Disciple. Impossible to go farther or higher than their inspiration.

I conclude with some lines from her own final “Act of Confidence, Faith, and Love”:

“Lord my God, I acknowledge that it is Thou who in my pains hast guided all; it is Thy goodness and Thine almighty power that have provided for all, in return for the abandonment of all that, at Thy request, I have made by Thy grace. What shall I give to Thee, Lord, in return, save Thyself to Thyself . . . ?

“As for the future, I thank Thee for it as though it were already done . . . for I firmly believe that in one way or another, Thou shalt do all for our salvation and even for our happiness.

“Often, often and often, persons and things seem to say No to me: but I mount above myself, above all created things, in a humble, firm, and joyous faith, and I look into the face of Thine infinite goodness and Thine almighty power, and I believe all to be possible, since I expect all things from Thee. Thou art Thou, Lord—that is to say, by essence, goodness, love, almightiness.

“Yes, Lord, for myself and for those I love, I will believe, I will have confidence in Thy love; Thy love is incomparable, personal, individual, infinite, passionate; and I will abandon myself in simplicity, and fully to the infinite tenderness of Thy Heart towards us, Thy handiwork.

“Lord, to Thee I trust my life, and that of my dear, dear sister; Thou wilt come to us, Thou wilt

provide for all. Thou wilt come to us with infinite treasures of faith, of hope, and love, with abundance of all good things—of joys. Joys? Is that saying too much, O my God? No, no! Joy is Thy desire, Thy will! ‘I have said these things to you that your joy might be full.’

“Lord! We *must* believe in so much love: Our joy is the joy of *Thy* heart. . . . Thou willest that our two lives should be but one, or rather that mine be lost and merged in Thine, that in a familiarity, a divine society in the midst of myself, where Thou dwellest, Thou shouldst be All to me, All in me, All in all created things.

“God is my Sun. My faults do not anger Him, do not diminish His love. To forget all for my Sun; to receive all from my Sun; to dare all for my Sun. To work ever for my Sun, is rest.

“That Thy gifts to me, O Jesus, be for ever glorified, Jesus, my Beginning, my Life, my sovereign ultimate end, have pity on us, in Thine infinite mercy, save us from everlasting death. Grant us, we pray Thee, O God, some day to exalt, praise, and bless Thine adorable Name, with Thy Saints, eternally, in heaven, with those who have gone there before us, whose example speaks so loud to our faith, and who are so dear to our hearts, Amen.”

There is little else to say. In all this ecstasy, her physical pains had not left her. She had constantly offered herself as victim on behalf of her Society, and just as Villepinte was maturing, tuberculosis conquered her. On October 7, 1883, she received the last Sacraments. Death, which had so much preoccupied her as a means of escape from the limited and transient, now changed

altogether into the way by which she might reach her Centre, and pass from a union with God within herself, known by faith, into that Vision of Him in heaven when faith would be no more necessary—His *chez soi* in eternity. Her illness was long; her minute thoughtfulness for others, her courtesy, her gratitude, never failed. The end came very gently and with full consciousness. In the evening of the 7th of June, 1889, after repeating with the Sisters the prayers for those in their agony, she said very slowly, “Come, Lord Jesus, come,” laid down her crucifix, and began to make the sign of the Cross. As she made it, her soul passed out of this world.

Mère Marie Elisabeth de Luppé

(1841—1903)

It would be downright comic to supply a modern psychologist with the *dossier* of Sidonie de Luppé's childhood, and to ask him into what "complexes" her training must have driven her! Every repression, every stimulus was there, to make her into a very singular young lady indeed! And frankly, they might have succeeded, had not her intelligence received that tremendous drill which the Catholic religion, properly taught—and in mid-nineteenth-century France it could be very well taught indeed—provides; and had not her personality possessed—and this, no one explains—a superb *grip*, so to call it, a power responsive to what was powerful, an energy adequate to appropriate and assimilate the energetic. And there was the grace of God. It remains, that if you treat her history mechanically, she ought to have turned into the very opposite, at nearly all points, to what she actually was.

(i)

Her ancestry was dazzling, like its gold-and-azure coat of arms: Dukes of Burgundy, Barons of Montaur and of l'Herm, the Vendômois of

Fontaines shine in the Luppé pedigree: all the greater shock to the château of Milhas, near Castelnaudary in Languedoc, when the Marquis Louis de Luppé married a lady of very modest name, Eugénie Germier, who became the mother of Marie-Louise-Sidonie on January 13, 1841.

As a matter of fact, the marquis had acted not unwisely. He had been born in prison, in the throes of the Revolution, and the whirr and crash of the guillotine had echoed in his mother's ears. So his five children had to be brought up in simple circumstances; and their father, whose wife was always ailing and could do but little, had the entire responsibility of educating them, reconstituting the family fortunes, and of preserving his unblemished pride of race. This man was interiorly quite alone, until his second child, Sidonie, penetrated his solitude. A unique affection grew up, but not a soft one. She is not too pious—she comes down to breakfast prayers unsaid, and has to kneel down and say them while the coffee cools. . . . She is not too obedient, and climbs with her brothers through forbidden barns, sets the hay tumbling down; tumbles down, too, and nearly breaks her head. One year, the crops fail; the farmer's beasts die off; how plough, how sow, since machinery was not yet accessible? The overworked château servants, bidden to lend a hand, would have gone on strike. The marquis and his three sons go down and plough the fields; Sidonie shepherds flocks. At noon, she goes to the château to fetch her lunch. "Bring me mine,

my lady," says the shepherd boy; "you will pass our cottage." Sidonie goes, fetches her white loaf, fetches the boy's coarse slices, blushes at the contrast, and gives him hers. . . . Her father was local magistrate; at his side she learnt justice and charity, and to realise the many sides of life.

Milhas could not afford governesses; and a life wholly of barns and fields had its disadvantages; moreover, Elise de Luppé, Sidonie's aunt, was lonely in her grim house at Toulouse. She was asked to have her little niece, who was scarcely seven, to live with her. She accepted; and the poor baby, unable to realise that her father, though he dismissed her, loved her, went to a place where there was not much hint of love. Lessons, etiquette; above all, silence, hours and hours of it. At last there was an explosion—we may be grateful for it! The evening had been very, very long: the austere aunt, enthroned, drew, drew the unending threads through her embroidery. Suddenly, the silence, the dreaming lamplight, the delicate rhythmic hands seemed horrible. Sidonie sprang from her footstool; one vigorous kick sent flying tapestry-frame and lamp, and table and the chair. . . . "Cette fois," says the grave biographer, "Mlle. Elise parla."

What she said, we know not: but Sidonie went to school. She did well at school, though she developed the neuralgia that was to haunt her life, despite her horsemanship. And observe: she still is felt, by her father, as his companion:

more, her tact makes tolerable for her brothers the period during which those unfortunate young men were sent to Toulouse for schooling, and had to stay with the grim old maid. Their aunt imposed on them the same programme as Sidonie had suffered: it was the girl who drew to herself the lightning; and, a Monica before her time—"Let him alone for the present," the wise old Bishop counselled that mother, in torment for her son's sake—she knew how to go to a wise limit of indulgence even, and sat up to open the door when, now and again, they came home very late indeed. . . . Even her relatives seek her assistance when they want favours from her father, and her delicate touch smooths ruffled surfaces. She reminds me, a little, of Aloysius Gonzaga; but his really terrific masculinity, undisguised by his exquisite good manners, may have frightened his correspondents almost more than could his fractious, gouty father, whose secretary he was; the iron in Aloysius was ever fairly visible. Sidonie's letters leave no doubt that now, as always, her touch was light and her spirit sweet, and a bright humour plays across her words.

(ii)

She was twenty-four. At last "vocation" whispers to her soul. She approaches her aunt—may she join the Trappistines at Blagnac? "Most certainly not!" Wise and curt decision. In 1866 a ladies' retreat is given at the Toulouse

Auxiliatrice. Sidonie attends it, and at its close visits the Superioress. It was Marie-Thérèse herself, and this time Sidonie finds a welcome, and, by God's kindness, her aunt does no worse than impose a year's delay. Difficult year, in that house, silent and more silent! She was alone now with her aunt, whose eyes were bent ever more sternly upon her work. Only the irresponsive portraits of old ancestors watched the girl, who became thin and white, and felt herself, somehow, to be deserting. . . .

But December came, and very early, carrying a little lantern, Sidonie went alone to her celestial marriage.

And soon, a gentle miracle! The desolate old woman became lovable, proving thereby that in her soul love had not, despite all seeming, withered. She visits her niece, she writes to her, she writes home about her—

“Sidonie is extraordinarily well: she has more colour; she is growing fat. She is happy and contented. This proves that she is in her true vocation. God was really calling her.”

For years the affectionate correspondence continued; and when times grew hard, Mlle. Elise sent money to her niece. . . . In 1881 she died, still at Toulouse, but less alone, surely, though unaccompanied, and no more “disappointed.”

In the noviciate, which began on April 29, 1866, and spent part of its time at Castelnaudary, M. de Soubiran, who acted as Director there, had

every opportunity of displaying his symmetry of mind at the expense of Sister Marie-Elisabeth, as she was now called. She was sub-sacristan, and was made to adorn and readorn the altar as much as fifteen times, till he judged that the candles, the flowers, this side and that, exactly corresponded. . . . He tried to teach her mathematics—poor girl, she had no head for them; and, later on, she was able to console a Sister, terrified at having to teach book-keeping, by anecdotes of her own incompetence in that art. . . . However, she became “admonitrix” to her fellow-novices, so sweet was her tact, so serene her method. Finally, she and another novice, whose judgment Marie-Thérèse valued, were made her secretaries, and took down from her lips the draft of the Society’s rules, gave them shape, and submitted the results for final touches before their definite publication.

She took her vows on June 1, 1868, and was wonderful, a friend wrote, in her sudden and complete transfiguration, her spiritual *flowering*. “Never have I seen a radiance more intense, more intimate, more expansive.”

Within six weeks she was made Superioress of a home for little blind girls, task for a double tact, since the supreme authority resided with a Government official who regarded the Sisters as his staff. Back from this post she was plunged into a month’s retreat at Amiens; she kept no notes of what it may have meant to her—they were burnt, perhaps, or lost; or perhaps, true to

her collected, pacified mentality, she found no "vivid" impressions to write down. Under the grace of God, her impulsive, ardent nature had been, not quelled, not nullified, by her stern noviciate of so many years, but unified already into one holy, peaceful energy. That is an image, almost, of heaven's joy.

Fresh from her retreat she went to be Superior of the hostel at Lyons for working-girls which I have mentioned above. The house was unfinished—no doors, no windows. And little enough to eat—milk, cheese, salad for their dinner. And the inmates were tough to deal with. . . . Rules? They were made, you would have said, to be broken. "Time for bed? Not I," said Mademoiselle X. "I shall sit up." "Very well, my dear," said Mère Elisabeth. "I will sit up with you." And she established herself on the stairs till two o'clock. At two o'clock the young lady, sleepy enough by now, retired to bed, yet not too sleepy for a final protest. She hurled a chair at the head of the serene Superior.

Back to Toulouse, to be Mistress of Novices. But it is 1870; the novices go to London; the house becomes a hospital. For the first time, perhaps, she encounters *fear*. For they bring in the badly wounded; they die all too swiftly; and each night she has to pass, alone, through the corridor where corpse beside corpse lies rigid.

War over, and the Commune, she sets out for England by the first train of the new service. Once national equilibrium has been lost, it takes

long to recover. The carriages are full of howling, insolent drunkards. A grim little anecdote: After a tunnel, "Mother," whispered her companion, Mère Marie-Jean, "how I longed to take your hand in that darkness!" "My dear, it was lucky you didn't. I'd have thought it was one of *them*. I've only my nails—but I'd have scratched your eyes out!" But a happier little tale suggests she needn't have feared, so disarming was her friendly smile. Sailors and some soldiers fill every carriage in the train she has to take. "Can you make room for me?" Their faces fall. She gets in, and she smiles. Instantly conquered, they make room, uncork a bottle, and offer her, *first* of any, a mouthful. So charming is her refusal, that each new bottle broached is offered to her first, till, in despair, a soldier dashes to some station buffet and purchases her some sugar. . . . It ended like that always; in trains, on boats, on quays, soon enough they were all about her, telling their troubles.

From London they returned, to Bourges this time, and it is here that while she does the linen in the morning she tries to learn the book-keeping she must teach in the night-classes.

Thence to Toulouse in 1872, where, as Superior, she encounters the first breath of that new spirit which already strove to animate, and thus transform, Marie Auxiliatrice. Too much work has been accepted; hence, a personnel was insufficiently, because hastily, prepared; and finance goes wrong. In spite of all, she struggles to

maintain a right observance of the rule. Criticism, recrimination, calumny. She falls sick of a most painful illness, and after a difficult cure at Vichy, she returns to Bourges, to find the crash has come.

Though Mère Marie-Thérèse had not yet been forced to leave her Congregation, she was powerless within it, and in 1874 her withdrawal, as I related, actually occurred.

It is extraordinary how Providence seems to have used Mère Marie-Elisabeth, throughout her life, as a connecting-link between the opposing parties, and in particular, within Marie Auxiliatrice, to join the old, which seemed doomed, to the new, which was yet to dawn. And really nothing could be more wonderful than the way in which the new Superior-General seems forced to make use of her and keep her even closer beside her, despite her exasperated comment, spoken more than once: "As long as we two run in double harness, all will go ill." But on the side of Mère Elisabeth, never a word of reproach, no repining, no appalment, even in the hours of worst humiliation, now to begin.

At the outset, it is clear she is not wanted. She belonged to the old order, which was to be obliterated. She is handed on from place to place, and when, in 1874, the General Chapter at Castelnau-de-France decides to close that house which had cradled the Congregation, she, like the others, has to beg her way through France till she is made Superior of the Toulouse house, itself, you would have rightly said, in its death-agony. However,

in unheard-of poverty she keeps it in existence for a few years yet, till after her removal, in 1877, to be Superior at Bourges, the Toulouse house expired.

Were this a fuller study of Mère Elisabeth, it would be a duty to detail her anguish at the thought of "the destruction of all that cost us so much to build"; the keenness of that humiliation which attends on failure; and the quick-calmed indignation of her thoroughbred instinct when weaker souls than hers yielded, left the pauper Community, and explained to the world their defection by abusing her. I should have, too, to dwell upon the splendid fibre of her humility, such that, without one moment of self-love, she yet could clearly see that the moral reconstruction of the Congregation had been put, by God, into her hands. To obey, interiorly, what you know you must correct, is a spiritual feat not easily accomplished! Yet, by concentrating her whole mind on that *Will of God* to which her pen returns and returns, she accomplished even this.

So at Bourges she pronounced, in 1877, her final vows, and at first all flourished. The house was humble enough, of wood, run up on the foundation of the proposed noviciate; soon they could emigrate into a better building; quite a large school for little children opened; children who could pay, but better still, for chimney sweeps, for acrobats; night-classes, too, for adults. No wonder she falls sick of her old illness, is sent back to her garret at Vichy, where hard work

has still to pay for her poor keep. And lo, while she is absent, a telegram from the Superior-General: "Shut the house." From Archbishop downwards, a storm of indignation; it falls, first and foremost, on her: at best, she is called coward; at worst, a fraud—for obligations, at Bourges, had been incurred; or, worse still, perhaps, advice, entreaties, all but orders rain down upon her, that she should leave so mismanaged a society. She sets her teeth and stays. "*Têtu comme un Luppé*," went a proverb. But not just *têtue* was the nun: it is not obstinacy to adhere, despite of all, to the ascertained Will of God; and He who had called her to the Vow—the final Vow—of Obedience, would not, she felt, desert her. She did not choose to stay just because *she* chose, but because He chose she should so choose. Yet the psychic strain was scarce endurable.

The inexplicable Superior-General who, as I said, had insisted on assigning to Marie-Elisabeth one post of responsibility after another—she was made Consultor-General in 1871, Assistant-General in 1879—now appointed her Superioress of the Mother-House in Paris. She was to govern it under the General's very eyes, and daily to assist her by advice. And the General was altering the plan, the ideal, the direction, and the very name of the Society, to every detail of which the mind and heart of the Assistant-General adhered. She always obeyed; yet she always advised, need I say, according to her true thought; no wonder, then, that the General said both of

her and to her, "As long as we two go in double harness, nothing will succeed." "Why not," asks the biographer, "unharness?" The General was free: the Constitutions left her full scope. Some ultimate and absolute inhibition prevented her from snapping this one link.

In 1882 Mère Elisabeth was taken from the Paris house, where her lovable influence had grown, I think, too strong, and was made Superior of the hospital at Villepinte, of which I speak below. After two years, during which that wonderful place owed everything to her, she was recalled to Paris.

In Paris, even Mère Elisabeth had to confess she suffered the pains of Purgatory. Idle to relate what was nothing short of persecution. The General kept at her side—and, I may add, was devotedly nursed by—the woman of whom she kept saying that she was hindrance incarnate. At last, in 1889, the moment came when the assistant could see no farther.

Perhaps she *was* just hindering. . . . She went to Cardinal Richard, the most loyal friend the Congregation ever possessed, and asked if she ought to leave. "Remain, my child," said he: "You *do* hinder—and that is much!"

In the June of that year Mère Marie-Thérèse had died. Perhaps, from heaven, her eyes saw deeper into the situation than, on earth, her humility had suffered them to do. Almost at once a spirit of wise courage began to animate the General's Consultors. She had bought a house for the

noviciate at St. Germain; after a year, she transports it to Paris; then back to St. Germain; then back to Paris. After four months it goes to a different house in Paris, then back to its original home there. She proposes next to take it away to Switzerland; the Consultors say No. She substitutes for this the plan of opening a house in Rome—and to Rome she goes; and on February 13, 1890, the letter announcing the Mother-General's resignation and exit from the Congregation arrived.

At once the Congregation seemed to awake from its bad dream of sixteen years. Undoubtedly, had Cardinal or Consultors acted earlier, and in some definite way driven the General to resign, there would have been a schism and a scandal. As it was, there had been suffering; but public opinion had formed itself; there was no schism; on August 29 the entire Congregation of professed nuns elected, unanimously, for their Mother-General, Mère Marie-Elisabeth.

(iii)

This outline was necessary if we are to understand the true significance of the present existence of the Congregation of Marie Auxiliatrice. In a word: never could we have understood how definitely God willed that this Congregation should be, and play its part, in the Catholic Church, had we not seen how violent an attack

was made upon it, how utterly *from within*, and how utterly from above—I mean, from the very *source of authority* within it. If an institution's very law of life can be attacked by its essential supreme authority, and if the mass of its members are vowed to obey and do so, and if *even so* the institution not only survives, but does so with its special *sort* of spirit undamaged, then it appears to me that we can more easily see in this the special Will of God, and in all the circumstances we are bound to realise that by a special design of Providence the Congregation of Marie Auxiliatrice lives, develops, and is to play a true part in the well-being of His Church in our days; and that, therefore, each true daughter of that Congregation can trust that she is, in her obedience, co-operating with that Providence. And happy those, indeed, who feel that they have the vocation to so tremendous a destiny.

And I would repeat that I can conceive of no way in which the second generation of Marie Auxiliatrice could have learnt the spirit of obedience, detachment, singleness of heart, sweetness, and peace in pain, the *integrally supernatural*, and perseverance in all this, even remotely comparable to the *object-lesson* provided to them by the spirit in which the first and most faithful Mothers of the Congregation spent those sixteen years. And what was a lesson for them can be a lesson for all the future; and since God did not refuse to allow this trial, so we on our side should not fear to record it. If we do not learn from it,

it is lost and, save for those actually involved in it, a waste product.

The very first thing that Mère Elisabeth and her companions turned their minds to was, need I say, the reconstitution of regular observance, which had been injured throughout, from noviciate to final vows. And that her subjects might be freed for a more perfected formation, she determined to close the houses recklessly opened and hurtfully demanding staffs of Sisters hastily and inadequately prepared. But what seems to me an almost piquant miracle is that the very first house the new General tried to shut, a school at Naples, not only had to remain open (one is stupefied to learn that in Naples the only facilities for the education of "higher-class" girls were protestant)—but thrived exceedingly; and in general the very thing—expansion—which had so damaged the Congregation under the last General, now seemed to happen spontaneously, needfully, and successfully. So wholly important is the spirit by which things happen, and so relatively unimportant *what* happens.

Enterprises on behalf of working-girls were renewed—on a scale which gradually became immense—in Paris and Lyons, and ought to be written about separately. What touches us more closely is the response made in 1891 to Cardinal Manning's prayer: "Go to my China," by which he meant the East End of London. Established there, the nuns were bidden by him to work exclusively for non-Catholics, and to

alleviate the physical miseries of their environment that the spiritual germ might the better live there and develop.

Haloës of sinister romance have been lit round the head of East End derelicts, somewhat to the neglect, I feel, of the South, not to mention the backs of Regent Street and Notting Hill. And, anyhow, I think more downright spirituality is likely to exist in Bermondsey than in Bayswater, and in Whitechapel than West Kensington. Materialism is worse for the soul than misery. Be that as it may: we would welcome a separate account, here out of place, of the truly "romantic" work done by these absolutely heroic Sisters in the first days of their settlement at Bow and ever since. Many a religious Congregation now has its houses in the East End, and many a good work undertaken by others than Catholics seeks to heal its sicknesses or at least to palliate them; the rather imaginative chapter in the French biography can scarcely give a picture in perspective of Marie Auxiliatrice in London, just as on our side we should hesitate to sketch a similar work in Paris without a good deal of observation. Perhaps, after all, it is the psychology of the "submerged class"—or of any class—belonging to one nation which is apt to elude a writer belonging to any other. It is an almost terrible thought, how different can be the *whole mind* of groups so near to one another. However, what conquered, as you may see, the differences, was unity of Faith. May God inspire many a girl,

possessed of the one Faith, and belonging to the same national mind and imagination as those whom she fain would succour, to offer herself to help Mary to help London.

But what Marie Auxiliatrice has become famous for—I do not suggest that fame is what most matters—what at first brought me into contact with Marie Auxiliatrice over twenty years ago, is their hospital at Villepinte near Paris, of which I first read in the very independent pages of M. Maxime du Camp's *Charité Privée à Paris*. I do not know whether that book is still accessible. It is amusing, inspiring, and altogether admirable. It was the idea of Mère Marie-Françoise, and suffices to cause us to remember her with gratitude. In 1877, Livry saw the birth of this great crusade against consumption. In 1881, the establishment moved to Villepinte, with its splendid park and a house positively made for the purpose, which included open-air treatment, a privilege assured in the first place to the nursing staff, since the Superior used to sit, at her table, under an open umbrella, so generously did rain and snow find their way into the worst room in the house. However, all this was remedied. I trust that a history of their house, abounding with the anecdotes I have here no room to print, may some day be offered to English readers. It will include the story of Mère Marie-Christine (Catherine Chester-Waters), whose British *sans gêne* used occasionally to take her French Sisters' breath away, only to show them, in a moment,

that they, too, could quite well thrive in the bracing atmosphere she had made her own. Another chapter would have to deal with the yearly pilgrimages to Lourdes, in which Our Lady cures so many of the Villepinte consumptives; and another, the most enthralling of all, would relate the incomparable miracles of grace worked by God in the souls of these sick girls.

Of the many other foundations, or developments due to Marie-Elisabeth, I say nothing at all.

It will be realised that a woman who had passed through storms like these, who suffered from so terribly painful a malady, and whose ideal was never to lose a minute, ought soon enough to have been worn out. It is true that when you see her photograph you quite possibly will remember Leo XIII. The same wide mouth—almost a straight line, yet vividly smiling; a rather strong, pronounced nose; eyes, it is true, at once more tired and more humorous—Leo XIII. administered to you electric shocks; Mère Elisabeth gives you a powerful but a more general tonic! Anyhow, you will feel, both of these have a force of personality that can resist most attacks, and, in fact, will take, if necessary, the initiative, and not give time to the attack, but do it first! And it is quite true that the nun husbanded her strength and refused to *squander* it in emotion. I own it was her short sight which gave a preliminary coldness to her welcome—she could not see who it was who came into her room till they were fairly close; but she was not really cold; the

intellectual conviction, the forceful love, alike were there, but controlled; and controlled love, in the long run, makes itself deeper felt, to the beloved, than any display of sentiment. But it remains that she really had an abiding consciousness of strength—not her own strength, but of God strong within her. When it was her duty to take a front place, she did not hesitate, nor yet distress herself if, in her behaviour there, she were “clumsy or awkward.” When she could do good, and did it, she did not pretend to herself it was *not* good, but first tried to supply the *idea* of it to someone else, so that they should do it and get the credit, or failing that, do it herself and ascribe the goodness, quite serenely, to its only source, God. All this meant that she started with, and ever developed, an admirable sense of perspective: after a question, she looked at you a moment without answering; then, gently, and so serenely that you did not have to say “firmly,” she put the only significant point of view; inessentials fell off, this side and that, and the problem was practically solved. Within a fortnight of her death, she had to discuss a complicated question about the position of Villepinte in regard of Government subvention. Her temperature was appallingly high; headache racked her; every word spoken hurt her throat. But she exposed the situation in such detail, and yet with so imperial a view, that the lawyer who was introduced to her bedside departed not only convinced that her opinion was right, but lost in admiration of her

self-possession and power of mind. Another time, "Your Superior," said a severe judge, "is capable of governing not one but half a dozen Congregations."

But observe that the very possession of so clear a mind is apt to exasperate its owner if he or she be surrounded by minds that are confused, or by apathy or ill-will. Almost to the end she owned to having to *quell* herself. She could be very angry, inside, indeed. And she was fearfully sensitive, as with her breeding was but natural, on anything that touched the question of honour. To be in debt was horrible to her. (And she felt, quite clearly, that her whole life was itself a debt, fully owed to Christ and His children. She had not a right to a moment of it. So from this aspect, too, you can see how she spent herself *altogether*.) In all this she applied to herself what she preached to others. She turned her *intellect* upon a problem; but then, with the light of faith, she put her feelings and even her arguments into the proper place, and went calmly forward.

"Do learn, dear child," she wrote, "to live by faith and not by argumentation and impressions. Build up in yourself, by means of prayer, an energetic will to belong to God and to seek Him only. . . . Disentangle yourself from yourself: do get out of this glue which sticks you up so, and keeps you from the real imperative business of your own sanctification and that of others. . . . When things go badly, we have

to try to make them go well, and we always succeed so long as we don't concern ourselves with ourselves. . . . One's 'self' doesn't deserve much attention, and it isn't out of place to snub it hard when it intrudes. Anyhow, there won't be much time to listen to it; and I am convinced that each of you is thoroughly tired of keeping up long conversations with so deadly dull a person! . . . Forget yourself," was her favourite maxim; and when the nuns asked her to expand it a little, she only said, "Put yourself to one side. . . . The best spiritual tonics are mortification and self-humiliation. Take big doses: swallow them at a gulp. Don't make faces. . . . Your letter was dictated by a black-edged imagination. . . . Yes, and your imagination is like a gymnasium, my dear, with little devils dancing about in it; and you, my silly, silly girl, instead of chasing them out by a big sign of the cross, you let them do their dancing on the top of you. . . .

"There is the transition! Self-crucifixion, but on Christ's cross. Don't just think of death—don't just lament over life, not even your own life. . . . Suppress *all* lamentation, inside or out, or rather, replace it with a heartfelt act of love for God. Say often, say very often: 'Jesus, I love you better than anything and everything; I only want what *you* like.' That is far more interesting than any amount of lamentations!"

Now you can see what this woman had to do to herself, not only when she saw her own faults, but when she saw what others ought to do, but did not! "You don't suspect," she said one day, "how violently I have to hold myself in when I

see anyone not doing her duty—what a temptation I have to conquer of *going and hitting her !*”

Assuredly, no one *did* suspect it, so sweet was the calm that brooded on her, and so gentle her strongest counsel.

None the less, all this wore out the machinery that the spiritual spark set working. Her agony was long; she never complained. She directed, from her sick-bed, even the details of her Society; in the April of 1903 the end drew rapidly near, and on the 7th of that month she died after a brief unconsciousness, her last words having been *Thank you.*

* * * * *

Marie Auxiliatrice is a great document flung down for us to read. It announces that God does not cease to intervene in the history of His Church; that He chooses whom He wills, and that unless the soul He chooses definitely rejects Him, He carries His will through. Short of a human will rejecting Him, He tolerates no obstacle. Sophie de Soubiran was chosen; education—meant for the very best—did all it could to warp her, to extinguish her; a priest, meaning the very best, coerces her, and sets her at a work which is not what God intends, but which can be diverted by Him, remodelled, developed into, something nearer to His plan. She has to break these man-made links, and tear their rivets from her very soul. Another priest assists her, then abandons her, then misdirects her; yet he, too, is saintly, and seeks, selflessly, to serve his God.

Meanwhile a spirit, alien in fact, yet thinking itself God's spirit, and causing those in whom it breathes to think it so, seeks to supply the work—God's hitherto—with a new principle of life. God's chosen instrument is broken, thrown aside, picked up reluctantly, mended somewhat, and put to a work for which, seemingly, it was never fashioned. Yet God does not treat us humans *merely* as tools—He loves us, and loves us not merely for the work we do, but for what we are, and we truly *are* just in proportion as He *is* in us. Therefore this very lonely child, Sophie de Soubiran, with her introspective, analysing mind, her timidity and self-rebuke, her vocation diverted, then recalled to its path but undirected in it, then seemingly nullified altogether, grows gloriously across the anguish and the error into the splendour of the confident simplicity that we saw. And not in her alone God triumphs. Her work triumphs; it has pursued itself, *just* alive, incarnate in her best-loved daughter—the Sidonie de Luppé who became Marie-Elisabeth. Do what she would, she who had usurped the work could not evict her; seemed forced, on the contrary, to link her even closer to it. And suddenly, Marie-Françoise, having contributed that at least to the permanence of the Society, having—who knows—done a real work, real though imperfect, *almost* destructive yet somehow still constructive, is eliminated. May God assist her, should she need it, in the unknown whither she has vanished. And the work remains, develops, and is blessed. We thank

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God for it; we wish it well; we bless it for its lowly, yet most noble, will to *help*; God give it many a recruit and a great future; we humbly link to the great Help it gives, our own poor aspirations, just to serve, in this hour of strife and snatching, the least of God's little ones.



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